



# Enlightenment and Dissent

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### Communications

## Editorial

According to Dilthey, 'the main features of the Enlightenment were everywhere the same: the autonomy of reason, the solidarity of intellectual culture, confidence in its inevitable progress, and the aristocracy of the spirit'.

Such a remark prompts two questions: First, is this a good characterization of the Enlightenment? Was it virtually the same in all its manifestations? Or, did it present in different countries features or aspects that are not immediately recognizable elsewhere? Did all the leading spirits believe in the supremacy and self-sufficiency of reason? Did they all believe in the perfectibility of man? Secondly, if this is a good characterization, if these were the dominant ideals of the movement, what relevance do they have for our own times?

In some quarters the thinkers of the enlightenment have been condemned for over-estimating the power of reason to solve metaphysical and religious problems, to resolve moral and political disputes and to secure harmony between peoples. They have condemned the naivety of those who believe that human nature is essentially good, and that men, if liberated from various forms of oppression embodied in established institutions, will live together in peace and harmony. They have condemned, too, as false optimism the belief that the human condition is destined to improve through time and that the earth will ever increasingly become a more hospitable environment...Are these criticisms just and should the ideals of the enlightenment be discarded, or are there some things to be salvaged that continue to deserve our loyalty and support?

Hitherto this journal has been mainly concerned with historical questions. Perhaps the time has come to turn aside, if only briefly, from purely historical questions, to evaluate the relevance of the concerns, the beliefs and ideals of those whom we have dubbed 'enlightened'. So we invite contributions on the related themes of the concept of the Enlightenment and the relevance of the Enlightenment today, and if there is a sufficient response from our readers we shall devote the 1990 issue of the journal to publishing their reflections.

Last year we gave notice that our subscription rate would have to be increased in order to ensure that the journal pays its way. We have now

had to make those increases. We hope our subscribers will remain loyal to the journal. Our aim is to keep the price as low and our subscription rates as stable as possible. The journal is not a profit-making venture, and any surplus accruing will be used to improve the quality of the product.

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'the desertion of our friends and party with whom we have gone in church courts from the beginning' and on the necessity to ally 'openly with leaders in Church courts who I am afraid in any great cause such as Dr. Magill's...would lean too much to the fanaticism of the mob.' The appeal to public opinion so carefully eschewed by the campaign committee was thus made unavoidable by the conduct of Moderate men of influence. <sup>69</sup>.

**CONTROVERSY AND CONCILIATION IN THE ENGLISH  
CATHOLIC ENLIGHTENMENT, 1790-1840**

*Brian Carter*

The span of years, 1790-1840, though not bounded by any historical landmarks, encompasses crucial periods of at least two major chapters in modern English history. The influence of the Anglican Evangelicals, for example, was exerted most effectively on English social, political and religious life under the guidance of such leaders as William Wilberforce, Charles Simeon, Hannah More and others, many of whom were connected with the Clapham Sect. Through their activities and with their reforming and improving zeal, the Evangelicals left virtually no aspect of English life untouched. Concurrently, the most celebrated and perhaps dominant issue of domestic English politics was running its course. That was the struggle for Catholic Emancipation.

Strangely enough, it was partly through the influence of John Henry Newman that the perception of these two developments came to be reappraised, and the resulting achievements seen as overshadowed by subsequent events. The influence that Newman exerted in this respect was to some extent unwitting and the way in which it manifested itself was quite different in relation to each of the developments. Newman was a co-founder and moving spirit of the Tractarian/Oxford Movement; the urgent message he carried was a call to Anglican clergy to remember the duties and privileges of their priestly office as successors to the Apostles. The times were evil, said Newman, 'yet no one speaks against them'.<sup>1</sup> For a variety of reasons, the Tractarian/Anglo-Catholic tradition gained the centre-ground of Anglicanism, or at least it appropriated to itself much of the credit for a renewal of Anglican Church life in Victorian England. Besides their own publications, there has been a remarkable flow of scholarly studies relating to Newman himself. The cumulative effect of this has been to establish the movement as the most central event in the history of the English Church in the nineteenth century, as well as to confirm the view that those involved in the movement were the instigators of a great revival. It is evident that a great deal did need reforming; however, the remarkable achievements of the Evangelicals in this same pre-Tractarian period have tended to be obscured as a result of the later judgements.<sup>2</sup>

Newman's influence over how people came to view the history of the Roman Catholic community of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth



century was exercised in quite a different way. His thesis was persuasively introduced in his sermon, *The second spring*, preached to the Synod of Oscott on 13 July 1852.<sup>3</sup> The Roman Catholic hierarchy had been restored in 1850 and the synod was the first full gathering of bishops and clergy. In the years immediately preceding it, Newman had become a Catholic, and many other Anglicans had converted also; the Catholic hierarchy was restored; a major expansion in the Church building programme was under way, and virtually every aspect of Catholic Church life seemed to be vigorous and expanding. In his eloquent and moving sermon, Newman compared this rebirth to a 'second spring', where 'the past has returned.' He referred not only to the state of the Catholic Church in the post-Reformation period, but also to the contempt it had fallen into at the time when he was young: 'No longer the Catholic Church in the country; nay, no longer, I may say, a Catholic community;—but a few adherents of the Old Religion, moving silently and sorrowfully about, as memorials of what had been.'<sup>4</sup> As the century progressed, the idea of the 'second spring' exerted a persuasive hold on the minds of many Catholics. It stimulated the growth of a new clerical, more ultra-montane Church which was also more self-confident and self-sufficient.

How Newman could have depicted the state of the pre-emancipation Roman Catholic Church in the way he did is puzzling. Although he was not personally familiar with Catholics when young, nevertheless for most of the years of his upbringing and early manhood 'the Catholic Question' was of constant interest and concern to churchmen as well as to politicians. It is almost inconceivable that from the time he went up to Oxford as a student in 1817 he could have been unaware of the pressure from Catholics for emancipation.

The Catholic community of these years, though small, was in fact very vigorous, assertive and positive.<sup>5</sup> The history of the struggle for emancipation has been well recorded, but I should like to examine here the nature of the controversial activity and debate which was tenaciously pursued from the late eighteenth century up to the granting of emancipation, and a decade beyond. Attention will also be paid to some of the leading figures involved. At the beginning of the period under discussion, that is c.1790, the level of Catholic-Protestant debate between the two parties was relatively quiet after the great outburst of popular anti-Catholic feeling in the Gordon Riots in 1780. Various tentative but significant moves had been made by Parliament to relieve disabilities for both Dissenters and Catholics. Dr. Potts (1754-1819), writing in 1790, reflected on this relative calm,

Of late...the wall of separation erected between Protestants and Roman Catholics by the intolerant jealousy of former governments has gradually decayed and crumbled into ruin, at least as far as it prevented their friendly intercourse and social connections.<sup>6</sup>

In considering the old confusion and hostility arising between the parties, he asked whether due to,

a finesse not uncommon in controversy, they availed themselves of the ambiguity of theological terms, to mistake the belief of those by whom it was used?<sup>7</sup>

Potts wished to conduct an inquiry into the relationship between Catholic doctrine and 'laws of nature and civil society'. If it was found that there was no conflict, then it should follow that there ought to be no grounds for withholding the rights, benefits and privileges of citizenship. What he wished to avoid was an inquiry into 'Popish doctrine' and its relationship to the 'code of revelation'. In proceeding this way, Potts hoped he had,

steered as clear of controversy as it was possible, not only because the subject itself is unfashionable, but because it is not essentially connected with the purport of this Inquiry.<sup>8</sup>

Three points arise from these remarks. The first is Pott's intention to shift the ground of debate from consideration of theology to those of political theory; the second, his reluctance to become involved in controversy; and the third relates to his view that controversy is unfashionable. In looking more closely at these points, the central position of controversy itself, both as an internal question within the Catholic body and in the Catholic-Protestant interaction, will become clear. It may be thought that controversy in this context needs no particular explanation beyond its use as a general description of the ongoing state of active discord between the Roman and Protestant churches in England at this time, but the reality was both more complex and interesting.

Examination of the leadership of the Catholic community in England in the late eighteenth century will throw light on the reason why quite different attitudes to controversy developed over many decades. The leadership of the Catholics from the late 1770s was predominantly in the hands of a small group of laymen, made up of aristocrats and landed gentry, who sponsored Enlightenment causes and ways of thinking.<sup>9</sup> This group formed the Catholic Committee, which was successful in 1778 in petitioning Parliament for certain measures of relief. These included the lifting of penal laws and provision for opportunities of promotion for Catholics in the armed services. Over the next twelve

years, a clerical element was introduced into a reconstituted Committee but those members tended to reflect existing interests.

Between 1787 and 1791 Charles Butler (1750-1832), who since 1782 had been Secretary to the Committee, worked on a draft of a bill for full religious toleration for Catholics. These few years of debate over the bill, 1787-1791, were critical for the future development of the Catholic community in England. Arising from the dissension within the community itself grew all the important elements which were to dominate the attention of its leaders and spokesmen for the next forty years. During the drafting of the bill, certain Oaths and Declarations were introduced, along with other matters, the most crucial that Catholics would in future be called Protesting Catholic Dissenters. In October 1790 the four Vicars Apostolic of England condemned the form of Oath recommended by the Committee, and in the following January, a few months before the bill was to be debated in Parliament, an Encyclical Letter was issued by three of the Vicars Apostolic giving their opinions on the revised bill.<sup>10</sup> The fifth article of the Encyclical stated,

We further declare, that the Assembly of the Catholic Committee has no right, or authority to determine on the lawfulness of Oaths, Declarations, or other Instruments whatsoever containing Doctrinal matters; but that this authority resides in the Bishops...<sup>11</sup>

They go on to say that they 'totally disapprove of the Appellation of Protesting Catholic Dissenters given us in the Bill.'

It was at this time that John Milner (1752-1826) was establishing himself, not only as a man of letters but also of action. In February 1791 he published his *Facts relating to the present contest amongst Roman Catholics*.<sup>12</sup> His purpose was to inform members of Parliament that the Catholic Committee did not speak for the majority of English Catholics. The first point at issue for Milner concerned the new title of Protesting Catholic Dissenters to which he felt the strongest possible objection, as an 'attempt to conceal their essential connexion with the See of Rome in spiritual matters'; nor was the title 'consistent with their plain dealing which ought to characterise their transactions with the legislative'.<sup>13</sup>

This sharp division within the Catholic community and the key positions held by Butler and Milner on each side was to last for nearly forty years. The relationship between the two men was hostile and acrimonious: Milner appeared to be the more robust and vociferous in public debate and discussion. Butler, however, was well able to fight his own battles. Milner's position of authority was enhanced in 1803 through his appointment as Vicar Apostolic of the Midland District, and

his influence was further reinforced on his being appointed as agent in England for the Irish Bishops. Butler on the other hand, was Secretary and prime mover of the various Catholic committees and boards for most of his working life; he knew all the aristocratic leaders of the community and enjoyed negotiating.

It is difficult to disentangle concurrent disputes between the two groups, whether relating to Episcopal appointments, diocesan administration, or the authority of Rome in English Catholic affairs, and various other matters. However, both groups would have agreed that the desired objective was Catholic emancipation and religious toleration, although they continued to disagree on how best to achieve it. By examining some of the disputes between them, a clearer understanding will emerge of the idea and reality of controversy.

Butler and the Committee in the early years felt confident, if left to themselves, of their ability to reach a satisfactory conclusion with the government. Representing well-known and influential Catholics, they evinced an inner conviction that a civilized understanding could be reached between themselves and government ministers. Butler was satisfied that the desired end could be achieved without loss of essentials even if it meant meeting the government more than half way on certain points which were deemed critical. Conciliation was to be the key to ultimate success: it was at the heart of the Butler strategy.

In contrast, Milner viewed conciliation with suspicion. Beside the objections already noted to the adoption of the title Protesting Catholic Dissenters, he reprobated it as a concession which betrayed the English Catholic heritage and those who had suffered and died for their faith as Roman Catholics, and which quite inappropriately associated Catholics with Dissenters. Butler was not allowed to forget his approval for such terminology.

Milner's attachment to Rome was reflected in another dimension of controversy within the Catholic community. In *Ecclesiastical democracy detected* (1793), he engaged in debate over the question of the appointment of bishops.<sup>14</sup> The Catholic Committee, now reconstituted as The Cisalpine Club, was hopeful that it could devise a scheme for an electoral assembly composed of clergy and laity who would appoint bishops without consultation with Rome.<sup>15</sup> Milner (and others) refused to have anything to do with the scheme, and was intent on publicly expressing his concern although, as he said, there were Catholics 'who deprecate the appearance of any publication that wears the appearance



of religious controversy, though made in the defence of avowed truth'.<sup>16</sup> He rightly feared that Butler's policy of conciliation in the interests of the leading lay Catholics would be much assisted by the silence of the Catholic majority. But in speaking up for them (as he conceived) he was combatting an enduring strain in English Catholic life. This was noted in the Reverend J. Fletcher's *Reflections on the spirit of religious controversy* (1804), published anonymously. 'Is there not', he asked rhetorically, 'something strikingly singular, in the aversion which a multitude of Catholics entertain to the publication of Catholic books?'<sup>17</sup> He acknowledged that in the country at large were harboured a number of irreconcilables,

men of the old leaven; unhappy splenetic characters, who seem to regret our little comforts, and industriously counteract the beneficence of the legislature....men, who are, forever unsheathing those murderous arms which have wounded us so often.<sup>18</sup>

Fletcher's own recommendation was for controversy conducted with the objective of conciliation in mind:

It comes to unite the divided; and to shew that divisions are the effect of misunderstandings, interest, or passion. A controversial work comes to implore benevolence; to instruct ignorance; or to enlighten prejudice.<sup>19</sup>

Such arguments were sufficiently persuasive for the Catholic publishers, Keating, Brown and Keating, to attempt in 1813 to set up a new quarterly periodical to be called *The Conciliator*.<sup>20</sup> The attempt failed, but the advertisement for the journal in the *Ordo* is instructive.<sup>21</sup> The purpose of the journal was to help remove prejudices against Catholics and the editors hoped that 'a publication, the object of which is conciliatory cannot be unacceptable to a liberal and enlightened people.' The same desire to 'publish and conciliate' was manifested some two decades later when *The Catholic Magazine and Review* was founded in (1831). The editors wished to provide a platform for 'learned, liberal and honest members of the church' in order to disprove the notion that Catholics were 'too selfish and narrow-minded to admit the principles of free discussion, and themselves so prone to persecution, as to shrink from all candid investigation of their principles'.<sup>22</sup> They declared that the 'controversial department' of the magazine would be limited by the desire to defend rather than attack and they would always prefer articles which had 'the tendency to conciliate than irritate'.<sup>23</sup>

Milner's own view of controversy was more realistic. He acknowledged that controversy involved conflict and that this was sometimes necessary:

Controversy, like just war, is productive of some commotion, but it is evidently the only means of preventing disturbance and mischief, in an infinitely greater proportion.<sup>24</sup>

In 1813 when his old enemy, Butler, had been responsible for formulating a further Relief Bill, Milner's intervention may have been decisive in procuring the defeat of the bill in the Commons. Certainly, this was the belief of the Catholic Board who decided to expel him from the 'Private Board', the key committee set up by the General Board of English Catholics. They were enraged by his frustrating their plans once again; they also wished to show their supporters in Parliament how much they deplored Milner's intervention and held him responsible for the failure of the bill. It is ironic that on the day Milner was expelled, the Irish Bishops, at a General Meeting held in Dublin to discuss the fate of the bill, passed an unanimous vote of thanks to Dr. Milner for the part he played in defeating the bill: 'our vigilant, incorruptible agent, the powerful and unwearied champion of the Catholic Religion, continues to possess our esteem, our confidence, and our gratitude'.<sup>25</sup>

Milner's objection to the bill centred on a lengthy oath the clergy would have been required to take and the constraints it would have placed on them. For years, the heart of the problem of achieving a bill satisfactory both to the government and the Catholics lay in the question of 'securities'. These securities would have to satisfy both the legislature and the public at large, so that if emancipation were granted it would be on terms that posed no threat to the existing order of things. A constant concern related to a potentially divided allegiance between Papal authority and the authority of King and Parliament. Into this continuous negotiating process, the question of the crown's right to 'veto' the appointment of Roman Catholic Bishops had grown over the previous fifteen years into a more and more decisive issue within the Catholic community. As a result of this split, the Catholic leaders could not speak with a united voice in negotiating with the legislature. In 1808, Milner had indicated privately that he was not against a 'veto', but had subsequently changed his mind and became implacably opposed to any such thing, as well as to most of the constraining 'securities'.<sup>26</sup>

To Milner, the concessions granted and agreements reached by the various Catholic committees and boards over the years were made under the guise of conciliation. Milner was a relentless opponent of this philosophy, and this accounts for the reason why he became positively obnoxious to so many of the 'natural' Catholic leaders. Writing in October 1816 on the dangers of 'vetoism', Milner cast his mind back reflectively and was in no doubt: 'Alas! I am a witness that all the

mischief which has befallen or threatened the Catholicity of these Islands for these thirty years past, has been brought forward under the smiling visor of *conciliation*.<sup>27</sup> He proceeded to enumerate various occasions when the philosophy of conciliation had been exercising its influence, including an ongoing dispute over a Catholic Bible Society: 'it is to conciliate the Methodists, in particular, that our Catholic Rheims Testament has lately been garbled.'<sup>28</sup>

In 1821, William Plunkett appeared to have a reasonable chance of obtaining relief with two bills; one granting emancipation to be passed in conjunction with another granting 'securities'. After the first reading, Milner made a predictable intervention. He issued a handbill giving his objections; and also arranged at very short notice a petition from Staffordshire Catholics opposing both bills. He enlisted the assistance of William Wilberforce to present the counter petition to Parliament. Plunkett responded in the House with a vehement and bitter personal attack on Milner, whom he would hold responsible should the bills fail. 'The same evil spirit which in 1813 came forward to blast the hopes of the Catholics is once more at work....I am satisfied that he is at the bottom of a measure, the object of which is, to destroy once more the hopes of his Catholic fellow subjects.' He saw Milner's action as true to character: 'I cannot help saying that in that individual it is only an act of undeviating, consistent bigotry': he is someone 'who has disowned that spirit of conciliation which animates his brethren'.<sup>29</sup>

To anyone unfamiliar with the chequered path towards emancipation, it may come as a surprise to learn of the deep, long-lasting and rancorous division within the Catholic community. It may be that these internal divisions in themselves were sufficient to delay emancipation, although external factors were quite adequate. If conciliation proved to be the axis for disagreement within the community, then controversy both in content and methodology between the churches was of continuing and vital concern.

The optimistic beliefs which those such as Potts expressed in 1790 that Protestant-Catholic relations were improving and that in the circumstances controversy was both unhelpful and unfashionable ceased to be tenable with the resurgence of the 'Catholic question'. Conciliation could neither prevent the repetition of Protestant prejudices concerning the incompatibility of Catholicism and good citizenship nor gibe against Catholic doctrine. Inevitably, this provoked a growth of controversial activity, indications of which can be found in the *Ordo*. In the 1779 edition, for example, there is a sixteen-page appendix consisting of a

catalogue of Catholic books, most of which are works of spirituality and devotion. In the *Ordo* of 1804, there is another book list, this time divided into sections, one headed 'controversial' under which there are fifty-nine titles. The *Ordo* of 1814 lists no less than one hundred and ten titles under this same section. Clearly, there was a perceived need for such a selection. Even a translation of a work by the Venerable Bede, by William Hurst in 1814, contained a 'Controversial Index'. According to John Lingard, in *A review of certain Anti-Catholic publications* (1813), it was obvious that,

a regular opposition to Catholic claims has lately been organized...The clergy have been placed in the front of the battle; and with the cry of danger to the Church, has been coupled that of danger to the constitution. To perpetuate religious disabilities, episcopal charges have been published, meetings of the Clergy have been held, and petitions from diocese, colleges and archdeaconries have poured into both houses of parliament. In aid of these efforts the press has been put into requisition: and the labours of the anti-Catholic journalists, the establishment of an anti-Catholic magazine, and the diffusion of anti-Catholic tracts, published in every shape, and adapted to every understanding, bear honourable testimony to the zeal and activity of those who assume the lead in this orthodox crusade.<sup>30</sup>

The observation occurring again and again from Catholic writers is that the description of Catholic beliefs and practice found in Protestant controversial works are a complete travesty and caricature of the actual position. The author of an article 'On the mode of conducting conversational controversy' (1814) complained that the Protestants were 'almost as little informed of the faith of their forefathers as that of the followers of Confucius or the grand Lamas', and such was their condescension that they assumed that 'no rational apology' could be made for Catholicism.<sup>31</sup> The aim of some of the Catholic controversial writers labouring under this sense of grievance and misrepresentation was to set out a form of debate and an agenda. Thus, in his *A defence of the ancient faith* (1815), Peter Gandolphy devoted a chapter to 'On Controversy', in which he argued first that controversy to be properly conducted should confine itself 'to a correct statement of the arguments which are advanced on both sides of the question', and secondly, that so conducted, controversy provides a means of unfolding truth so that those who were averse to it were in essence averse to the truths so revealed.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the reviewer of Van Mildert's Bampton Lectures refers to an aversion to religious controversy at the time; to him, it was 'part of that weak and indecisive spirit, which is sometimes most improperly dignified with the name of charity, to represent controversy on religious topics as a mark of an unchristian temper'.<sup>33</sup> The need for proper Catholic representation in controversy was clearly put by Francis



Martyn. Learned controversial works were 'quite unadapted to the acquirements of the great bulk of mankind'.<sup>34</sup> What was needed was 'a series of short, clear and comprehensive treatises on the principal points of controversy between us and the different denominations of Protestantism'.<sup>35</sup> It took a surprisingly long time before such popular controversial material became available, but by the end of the 1820s the whole position had changed. In the process, a number of individually important controversial books were published, and none more so than an original work by John Milner with the self-confident title of *The end of religious controversy*.<sup>36</sup> Written in the form of 'a friendly correspondence' between various churchmen, this work passed through many English as well as foreign editions. Milner had originally written the book in 1801/2, but was requested not to publish it. Subsequently, he changed his mind because of 'the increasing virulence of the press against Catholics', and the number of personal public opponents who attacked him 'besides numerous anonymous riflemen' from the periodicals. He felt that not to have responded could only have been interpreted as cowardice. The appearance of Bishop Burgess' *The Protestant Catechism*, which 'breathes the whole persecuting spirit of the sixteenth century' decided him finally in favour of publication.

F.C. Husenbeth (1796-1872), in his life of Milner, judged *The end of religious controversy* to be Milner's most important and lasting work:

No work of religious controversy had appeared in England to equal it; and none had ever excited so great a curiosity and interest, or met with a demand so extensive and encouraging.<sup>37</sup>

This may seem a rather over-enthusiastic assessment by a friendly biographer, but Husenbeth's judgement received confirmation from a quite different perspective: the Bishop of Lincoln, Christopher Wordsworth, in an address to the Church Congress in 1882, suggested that Milner's work 'has probably made more converts to Romanism than any book in the English language'.<sup>38</sup>

Milner's emergence as supreme propagandist for the Catholic cause was not accompanied by the settling of internal difference within the Catholic fold. His long standing quarrel with Butler acquired a new dimension as a result of the traumatic events in 1813 when he was expelled from the Private Board. Partly on account of these happenings, a new name and influence emerged: William Eusebius Andrews (1773-1837), editor, writer, publisher and controversialist. He became a champion of Milner and an opponent of Butler and the aristocracy. Apart from the occasional reference to *The Orthodox Journal*<sup>39</sup> or *The*

*Truthteller*,<sup>40</sup> Andrews is virtually unknown. Yet a closer examination of his work will shed light on a number of the issues under discussion.

Early in 1813 Andrews came to London from Norwich where he had been editor of *The Norfolk Chronicle* for some years. In London he hoped to find opportunities as a publisher of Catholic books, and on his arrival in the city went to see Charles Butler as the man at the centre of Catholic affairs. Butler told him that as the Relief Bill would soon be passed, there was probably little printing required by the Board (of English Catholics). A few weeks later the bill failed. Andrews formed the opinion that Catholics needed information especially so in view of what he had heard about the treatment of Milner, so he decided to print and publish a periodical. With great speed, he produced, in June 1813, the first issue of his new work, *The Orthodox Journal and Catholic Monthly Intelligencer*. He led with an article on the recent Relief Bill, which he examined clause by clause, adding his own astringent comments; next, he printed Milner's *Brief Memorial*, or objections to the bill, and this was followed by the Resolutions of the Board of English Catholics expelling Milner. Also printed in this first issue was The Pastoral Address of the Irish Bishops, objecting to the bill. In the address they stated that to have agreed to some of the 'Securities' would have incurred 'the heavy guilt of schism', and that others were 'utterly incompatible with the discipline of the Roman Catholic Church'. Andrews then reprinted the Votes of Thanks of the Irish Bishops addressed to Milner, their 'incorruptible agent', acknowledging his intervention in helping to defeat the bill. Finally, he suggested that Butler and the Board were 'corrupt hirelings' who continued to try to persuade the public that the Catholics in fact were still in favour of the bill.

The appearance of this new periodical, the information and the pointedness of the criticism it contained were totally at variance with all that Butler was striving for. This first issue contained many of the features that were to become the hallmarks of Andrew's individual style, and were to remain a potent force for almost twenty-five years. He grew to become a ceaseless protagonist for Milner, and Milner in turn became a frequent contributor to *The Orthodox Journal*, in his own name and under many pseudonyms. Andrews appeared to be remarkably well-informed and was quick to print any relevant information in his possession. He was in no doubt as to his primary role, as he told his readers in the first issue,

The great necessity of the Catholic body being informed of what is passing concerning them, and the advantages which must arise therefrom, outweigh every other consideration with me.<sup>41</sup>

His forceful, combative style was the very antithesis of that of Butler. At his first meeting with Andrews, Butler had not ruled out the possibility of printing work at some future date, but when Andrews visited him shortly after the publication of the first number of his journal he met with a hostile reception:

I was abused for daring to publish my own opinions without consulting my ecclesiastical superiors and the board secretary [Butler] and I was threatened with ruin, for setting myself in opposition to noblemen and gentlemen composing the society he acted for. The secretary told me personally that he should do me all the injury he could, and must give him credit for having acted up to his declaration.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the difficulties which Butler and the Catholic Board put in the way of Andrews, they failed to ruin him. The first series of *The Orthodox Journal* ran to eight volumes, dating from 1813 to 1820, and many of the leading Catholic figures contributed to it, with Andrews himself writing most frequently. Together with Milner, he offered a distinctive version of recent Catholic history. The starting point was often Butler and 'The Protestant Catholic Dissenters', and the aim, to demonstrate the ill effects of a weak conciliating spirit. Errors of judgement and supposed acts of deviousness were never forgotten and grievances harboured. The whole unfolding history was seen as forming a consistent pattern woven by a small group of unrepresentative 'leaders' who had to be opposed all the way. The press was seen as a vital weapon in this task. Although Andrews came to occupy a dominant position in Catholic publishing, predictably he alienated many of his more prosperous subscribers by his combative style and personal criticism of members of the establishment. The circulation figures of the *O.J.* and of other periodicals edited by Andrews were always fluctuating as a result of the opposition engendered, and the consequent lack of finance rendered their existence precarious. There were two additional reasons for the cessation of the *O.J.* in 1820 after eight years. The first was that Milner was reported to Rome for the highly critical nature of many of his contributions to the *O.J.* and was ordered by the Pope to cease writing for it or afford it any support. Milner, having been such an important contributor, had added significantly to its interest, and his withdrawal, together with these general criticisms of the journal, adversely affected its viability. The second of these reasons for its demise related to fears over the nature of Andrews' radicalism.

Milner and Andrews were of one mind on many issues, but they differed on one significant point. Each wanted emancipation but Andrews became more and more persistent in his demands for

parliamentary reform and for civil rights. In fact, he saw these as essential pre-requisites for unqualified emancipation. Milner, on the other hand, viewed such political theories as dangerous. Andrews reported later,

The good and venerable Prelate could not separate reform from revolution, like many other most worthy divines, and he was continually urging me, in our private correspondence, the near analogy of my politics to the dreams of the French Philosophers.<sup>43</sup>

It was from 1818 onwards that Andrews became clearly identified as a 'radical'. The *O.J.* of August 1819 contained several references to T.J. Wooler, the editor of *The Black Dwarf*.<sup>44</sup> A suggestion had been made that Andrews was tainted by Wooler's revolutionary brush, and was prepared to join 'the ranks of sedition and blasphemy as a means of attaining civil and religious liberty'.<sup>45</sup> Andrews denied any co-operation with Wooler whom he had never met, and added that he had only occasionally read *The Black Dwarf*. He went on to assert that if there happened to be a conjunction of views between himself and Wooler on political and religious liberty, then this revealed the consistency of the opinions he had held long before the existence of *The Black Dwarf*. In the following edition of the *O.J.*, Andrews also addressed his strictures to the Catholic Board. Why pick out Wooler alone? asked Andrews. Why not Carlile, Sherwin, Cobbett or other radical reformers? He provided the answer: the purpose of his critics was to try to identify him with Wooler, the know 'scoffer' of all religions, so that Andrews' regular subscribers would be driven away.

Andrews was also criticized for making common cause with the Protestants in their agitation for civil rights, for reasons less concerned with religion than with politics and especially internal Catholic politics. They were encapsulated in a letter from Clifford, one of the Butlerite party, to the *O.J.* in September 1819. He argued that a concerted populist move by radical reformers and some Catholics would be at the expense of, or might imperil, negotiations being undertaken by some of the Catholic aristocracy with members of Parliament. More to the point, he suggested that it was the aristocrats who really understood the interests of the 'Catholic body'. Their rank, education and ability, marked them out as natural leaders who possessed wisdom beyond the measure of 'the illiterate, or the intemperate, or the lower orders of society'.<sup>46</sup> Andrews, for his part, made light of aristocratic fears of 'the progress of public spirit' and pour scorned on their pretensions.<sup>47</sup> He could find nothing in the behaviour of the aristocratic party over the last thirty years to demonstrate that it had 'any talent, or ability, or



inclination to watch over the interests of the lower orders'. What was worse, it had brought disgrace upon itself for its treatment of Milner, 'the great champion of our spiritual interests'.<sup>48</sup> And for Andrews, it was his religion which led him to support the cause of reform:

we are taught in our catechisms that oppression of the poor is one of the four sins which cry to heaven for vengeance, and therefore, when the poor are oppressed whether by unnecessary taxes or otherwise, no Catholic, I think can conscientiously applaud their oppressors, or afford them any voluntary aid in support of their injustice.<sup>49</sup>

In contrast Andrews believed that their self-proclaimed leaders had abandoned their religion and the protection of their flock in the pursuit of power, and he offered this bitter denunciation in one of the closing numbers of the *O.J.*:

[they] have crouched to court favourites and heads of party; they have silently submitted to be calumniated and vilified; they have basely licked the hand that smote them, and even the precepts of our divine Saviour, to preach the truths of the Gospel, have been suspended, by the exclusion of controversial sermons from the pulpits of the metropolis, lest offence should be given to the feelings of the bitterest enemies of the Catholic faith, and an opposition thereby created to the granting of our civil claims.<sup>50</sup>

When *The Orthodox Journal* was closed in December 1820, Andrews immediately launched *The Catholic Advocate for Civil and Religious Liberty* with the aim of creating 'a political union of all religious denominations in support of their constitutional rights'.<sup>51</sup> The paper had some success among Protestant readers, but had to be closed down after nine months. Andrews wrote,

I had the mortification to find that a certain party in the Catholic body were using their utmost influence to withdraw from me the support of my Catholic friends.<sup>52</sup>

Yet it was always a source of pride to him that a public body of Protestants described *The Catholic Advocate* as 'the only paper in England that favoured the course of the people'. He continued to experiment with new journals. *The People's Advocate*, a political journal, survived only a few weeks.<sup>53</sup> *The Catholic Miscellany* he edited for some months before handing over to Ambrose Cuddon.<sup>54</sup> He then reopened *The Orthodox Journal*, but this lasted only for two years, from 1823 to 1824. While experimenting to find a satisfactory periodical formula, he was active as printer publisher and writer and was always willing assist the Catholic cause through the publication of controversial works.<sup>55</sup>

It was not until September 1824 that Andrews developed a successful concept for a new periodical/newspaper with the appearance of *The Truthteller*.<sup>56</sup> For the first year, this appeared as a stamped newspaper, then from October 1825 as a weekly political pamphlet; in this form, it ran to fourteen volumes until 25 April 1829. It retained much of the style of the earlier *O.J.* with close attention being paid to Butler and the aristocracy, but Andrews' theo-political views were given a more prominent position. Moreover, he found a new way to disseminate such ideas. In his leading article of 24 June, 1826, addressed to 'the Catholic Mechanics of Southwark, Friends of Civil and Religious Liberty', he outlined a plan for forming a series of local societies across the country, open to people of every religious faith, with the purpose of uniting their forces to obtain civil rights and religious freedom for all. To assist the work, members were to pay one penny a week 'Rent' which would be forwarded to the General Committee of the Friends of Civil and Religious Liberty. This penny 'Rent' would defray the cost of printing and distribution of tracts. In the short space of three months, societies had been formed in Bristol, Leicester, Sunderland, Wigan and Sheffield, with more than ten in London alone. Of these, the Leicester Society was of special interest to Andrews because it had been formed through combining forces with the Protestant Defence Society: the Committee constituted both Catholics and Protestants, and they agreed to the collection of 'Rent' for the purpose of distributing tracts. In the 4 August issue of *The Truthteller*, where an account of the Leicester Society is given, Andrews wrote another article to the Catholics of Great Britain, whom he addressed as 'Friends and Fellow Slaves'. This was a further impassioned plea to them on the broad basis as friends to civil and religious liberty:

The emancipation must be Universal; it must embrace both the shackled Protestant as well as the persecuted Catholic; both are equally concerned in the future welfare of the Country.<sup>57</sup>

He combined this plea for unity with a forlorn hope that a leader for the popular movement would emerge from the ranks of the Catholic nobility and gentry.<sup>58</sup> His exasperation with the aristocracy and in particular their failure to understand their natural constituency was voiced in the issue 7 April 1827:

I am lost in amazement and chagrine at the want of political feeling and sagacity betrayed by our natural leaders, and the deep knowledge evinced by the people of the real causes of the national disasters, and the remedies necessary to be applied to remove them.<sup>59</sup>

These criticisms had been made in one form or another by Andrews for nearly fifteen years and they were to continue. Only a matter of



weeks before the passing of the Emancipation Bill in 1829, he was writing in *The Truthteller* of the frustration of the Catholic body with the aristocracy. In an article headed, 'The Catholic Aristocracy and Gentry and the Press', he concluded that the distrust felt by the aristocracy for 'the feelings and voice of the people' arose from the decision made over forty years previously when the aristocracy and the gentry put their affairs in the hands of Charles Butler: 'the wily lawyer of Lincoln's Inn'. In Ireland, he argued, the Catholic population was so large that their leaders could not but fail to hear the voice of the people; in England, on the other hand, the Catholic population was small and scattered, and its voice more difficult to discern. Although there were large centres of Catholic population in several cities in different parts of the country, as well as in Lancashire, a significant percentage of Catholics was still clustered in relatively isolated places. In these clusters, Andrews suggested, many of the people were connected through some relationship or other to the old landed families, which made them susceptible to pressure to conform to the old norms. The inward and rather secluded way of life of the aristocracy and gentry made them almost a 'race peculiar to themselves' and greatly deficient in political knowledge and understanding compared with their Protestant counterparts. In contrast, the Catholic tradesmen and mechanics,

obliged to intermix and connect themselves with Protestants in matters of social life...have acquired an equal degree of intimacy with political information, and experiencing more of the grievances which bear alike on the mass of the people,...are more ready to seek a remedy of those abuses and corruptions, and adopt the broad principle of popular assemblies and free discussion.<sup>60</sup>

It was such people that Andrews hoped to attract as members The Friends of Civil and Religious Liberty. He had considerable success. He toured the country, encouraging and organizing the committees, and on occasion addressed large meetings. When the Emancipation Bill was passed in 1829, there were no cheers from Andrews; he felt a bitter sense of failure and betrayal. Emancipation was not unqualified: there was still an oath, and 'securities', and there was no parliamentary reform. What grieved him most of all was that nearly two hundred thousand forty-shilling freeholders were 'betrayed' by being disfranchised. These were the very people who had supported O'Connell and on whose votes he had risen to power. Andrews was so fiercely critical of O'Connell in *The Truthteller* that, as a result, many of his readers withdrew their subscriptions and the journal had to close.

Andrews was down, but not out. *The Orthodox Journal* was revived for two further volumes (1829/1830), and in the issue of October 1830,

he reflected on the times and on his personal situation. Never short of self-confidence, he made the particularly bold claim,

where is the Catholic, since the invention of printing who has written so much on religious controversy, politics and history as myself? For the last seventeen years of my life, I have been more sedulously engaged in literary pursuits than any of the recluses of the 'dark ages' who were employed only as copyists...days and weeks and months have I passed without the slightest recreation of mind in the performance of my duties to the public, and none but myself can tell the fatigues of body I have endured, and the turmoils of soul which I have sustained, since I first became the servant of that public.<sup>61</sup>

During these years, he prided himself on his single mindedness despite bullying, abuse and incentives to conform. And he continued to demonstrate his belief in the importance of an independent press, introducing and reintroducing four more periodicals, two of them in 1831, although both had a short life. These were the *British Liberator*<sup>62</sup> and Andrews' *Constitutional Preceptor*.<sup>63</sup> His efforts on behalf of religious and civil liberty had by this time made him an important figure in his own right, and they were acknowledged in motions of thanks from many parts of England and Ireland. If in the earlier part of his career he was particularly associated with Milner, his own sustained attack on the influence of the Catholic aristocracy and the policy of conciliation played a significant part in the realignment of the centres of power and influence of the Catholic community in nineteenth century England.

While such a realignment was taking place amongst sometimes fierce controversy within the community, the main area of controversial activity remained the traditional front between Protestants and Catholics. Following the publication of Milner's *End of religious controversy* the level of controversial activity increased. The Bishop of London, William Howley, noted such a development in the period between his charges of 1822 and 1824:

Among the most remarkable events which have occurred during that period is the revival of controversy respecting the pretension and doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>64</sup>

This was the period which witnessed the dispute between Robert Southey and Charles Butler.<sup>65</sup> Butler remained true to the irenic tradition of controversy. The introduction to his *The book of the Roman Catholic Church* (1825) began with a section called 'The Proper Style of Controversy' in which he expressed the hope that on both sides there would be 'an equal wish to sooth, to conciliate, to find real points of difference very few, and to render them still fewer.'<sup>66</sup> With two notable exceptions, Sydney Smith's *Two letters on the subject of the Catholics*,

published in 1807 and reprinted many times,<sup>67</sup> and William Cobbett's *A history of the Protestant Reformation (1824-1827)*,<sup>68</sup> the discussion of 'The Catholic question' in early nineteenth century England fell far short of the norms of civilized controversy set out by Butler. Most Protestant works expressed in varying degrees, fear and alarm over concessions to Rome or towards any Romeward movement. A variety of awful possibilities was presented to the public. Revolution or, at least, a de-stabilized society, or some other dire consequence might flow from countenancing the 'advance of Rome'. This mixture of fear, suspicion and resentment was summed up by the anonymous author of *Theory contradicted by fact (1827)*, who wrote,

Too long have we adhered to a system of conciliation towards men who are incapable of feeling grateful for it themselves, as they are adopting it towards other. Their hereditary audacity has lain concealed as long as it was in their interest to affect a patience and humility, which in their souls they scorned, but their confidence has increased our weakness. The treason which long lurked in their hearts now issues boldly from their lips, and will ere long show itself more plainly in their actions. One by one have the prayers of the Roman Catholics been granted: ever insatiate, each concession has stimulated them to fresh demands, till they now profess to consider our generosity as tardy justice, and have changed for menace the tone of supplication.<sup>69</sup>

The author's note of urgency and sense of impending trouble might have diminished had he known of a counter measure being prepared to check the advance of Catholicism.

In May 1827, a new dimension was added to controversial activity with the founding of the British Society for Promoting the Religious Principles of the Reformation, better known as The British Reformation Society. The aim of the society was to convert Catholics to Protestantism and its method was to engage peripatetic polemical missionaries who would issue a challenge by public debate at a given location to any Catholic spokesman who was willing to come forward. The speakers, the meeting and the subsequent publication of the proceedings would be subsidized by the society. It was a well-organized experiment, designed to contain the advance of Catholicism. By 1831, over two hundred such meetings had been held in different parts of the country, and some of these went on for several days. Strict procedural rules were introduced to ensure that both sides had a fair hearing and were accurately reported, but the Catholics were not always satisfied with their treatment and they tended to be at a disadvantage.<sup>70</sup> They did not possess the requisite human resources to provide a pool of able disputants who would have been free to move about the country to the

various locations chosen by the society. Moreover, the professed aim of the society to proselytise was at odds with its supposed adherence to the rules of impartial controversy. One may doubt whether for the ten thousands of people who attended its meetings they signaled the end of religious controversy or healed divisions between Protestants and Catholics, rather the controversy which it provoked was just as likely to have fuelled the fires of religious prejudice.

In examining the complex unplanned but interconnecting framework of theological and religious controversy in this period this paper has revealed a Catholic community which *pace* Newman was very much alive. Its alertness to its own interests was revealed in its overwhelming concern for emancipation, and in its internal debate as to the most appropriate strategy to be employed in the struggle. The conciliatory approach of Butler and of many on the aristocratic wing was sharply contrasted with the uncompromising stance of Milner, aided by the maverick figure of Andrews. Over the years, there were frequent references to the spirit of the enlightened times and of liberal opinion, and to the hope that these benchmarks of progress would work to the advantage of the call for emancipation. It is surprising how even in recent years, this view of emancipation as having been granted as a consequence of a general movement of advance and progress in society has found its advocates. E.M. Howse, in his study of the Clapham Sect and the growth of freedom argues that 'the new spirit of tolerance led to Roman Catholic Emancipation'.<sup>71</sup> A more hardheaded, and accurate, assessment of the way emancipation would occur was made at the time by Bishop Baines at a meeting of the Midland Catholic Association:

If ever we are emancipated, I fear it will not be a sense of justice and feelings of compassion, but fear and calculating selfishness that will extort the unwilling boon.<sup>72</sup>

That leverage and pressure was to be provided by the constitutional crisis raised as a result of the election of Daniel O'Connell as Member of Parliament for County Clare. If the spirit of the enlightenment had played only a small part in the eventual outcome, that of controversy had surely exerted rather more influence. Certainly such an outcome would have been unlikely had the members of the Catholic community been content to move 'silently and sorrowfully about'.

Oxford.

1. J.H. Newman, *Tracts for the times*, 1 (1833).
2. G.R. Balleine, *A history of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England* (1933), 210: 'The other delusion, often held by writers on the Oxford Movement, is that though the early Evangelicals had done useful work, their descendants were quite



- degenerate, with narrow minds, filthy churches, empty shibboleths, and lazy lives.' For a recent study of the ethos and mentality of the Evangelicals, see Boyd Hilton, *The age of atonement, the influence of Evangelicalism on social and economic thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford, 1988). For a different perspective, see Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians. The age of Wilberforce* (Cambridge, 1961).
3. J.H. Newman, *The second spring* (London, 1852).
  4. *Ibid.*, 16.
  5. See John Bossy, *The English Catholic community, 1570-1850* (London, 1975). This influential work re-examines the position of the Catholics as a community and sees the period from the late sixteenth to the middle of the eighteenth century as one in which the community went through 'a process of separation: a severance of bonds of collective behaviour which would once have united them to other Englishmen; a movement from the habit of performing religious and sacramental acts as members of a uniform society, to that of performing them as members of a small nonconforming community' (108). Contrary to a traditional view that the post-Reformation Catholic community gradually dwindled away, Bossy shows that there was a remarkable stability in the numbers of the community over these two centuries with a total of c.80,000 in 1770. From 1770, he points to a continuous expansion of the community and this expansion was not due to any influx of Irish immigrants, nor to a miraculous 'Second Spring' starting sometime in the 1840s.
  6. [T. Potts] *An inquiry into the moral and political tendency of the religion called Roman Catholic* (London, 1790), 4.
  7. *Ibid.*, 25.
  8. *Ibid.*, 163.
  9. See Eamon Duffy, 'Ecclesiastical democracy detected', *Recusant History*, 10 nos. 4 and 6 (1970), and 13 no.2 (1975). Duffy examines the tension in the Catholic body and concentrates on two parties, the Vicars Apostolic on the one hand and the Cisalpines under the particular guidance of Joseph Berington on the other. He concludes that 'Berington and his colleagues had cast their lot with the forces of Enlightenment—with Priestley and Rational Dissent, with hostility towards the Establishment, with Foxite Whiggery, with the French Revolution. These they concluded were the channels through which the benefits of the British Constitution might be extended to Catholics. The Revolution they had welcomed so enthusiastically destroyed their cause.' (Part III), 138f.
  10. Vicars Apostolic were titular bishops with restricted powers and without a diocese: they were usually deployed in a missionary country. From 1688 to 1848 England and Wales were divided into four geographical areas, each with its own Vicar Apostolic; the districts were the London, the Midland, the Northern and the Western.
  11. *Encyclical Letter*, 19 Jan. 1791.
  12. John Milner, *Facts relating to the present contest amongst Roman Catholics of this kingdom concerning the bill to be introduced in Parliament for their relief, 24 Feb. 1791* (London ?).
  13. *Ibid.*, 2.
  14. John Milner, *Ecclesiastical democracy detected* (London, 1793).
  15. Cisalpine Club, formed from the old Catholic Committee which was in turn succeeded by the old Catholic Board in 1808: the title itself indicates that it had certain affinities with Gallicanism as distinct from Ultramontaniam.
  16. Milner, *Ecclesiastical democracy*, i.
  17. [J. Fletcher], *Reflections on the spirit of religious controversy* (London, 1804).
  18. *Ibid.*, iii.
  19. *Ibid.*

20. See Bernard Ward, *The eve of Catholic Emancipation*, 3 vols. (London, 1911-1912), vol.2, 173. And Joseph Gillow, *A literary and biographical history, or bibliographical dictionary of English Catholics*, 5 vols. (London, 1885-1902), vol.I, 322f. Ward believes that a few numbers of *The Conciliator* appeared; Gillow is equally definite that they did not.
21. *Ordo Recitandi Officii Divini* (1813).
22. *The Catholic Magazine and Review*, I, preface.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Milner, *Ecclesiastical democracy*, iii.
25. *The Orthodox Journal* (London, 1813), vol.1, 18. [Hereafter *O.J.*]
26. Milner, *A letter to a parish priest* (London, privately printed, 1808).
27. *O.J.*, 4 (1816), 400.
28. *Ibid.*, 401.
29. David Plunket, *The life, letters and speeches of Lord Plunket*, 2 vols. (London, 1867), vol.2, 71f.
30. John Lingard, *A review of certain anti-Catholic publications* (London, 1813), 3.
31. *O.J.*, 2 (1814), 92ff.
32. P. Gandolphy, *A defence of the ancient faith, or a full exposition of the Christian religion in a series of controversial sermons*, 4 vols. (London, 1815), vol. 1, 183.
33. *The British Critic*, new series (March, 1815), 253.
34. *O.J.*, 4 (1816), 149ff.
35. *Ibid.*, 150.
36. John Milner, *The end of religious controversy* (London, 1818).
37. F.C. Husenbeth, *The life of the Right Reverend John Milner, D.D.* (Dublin, 1862), 370.
38. *The official report of the Church Congress held at Derby* (London, 1882), 313. See also Wilfrid Meynell, *John Henry Newman: The founder of modern Anglicanism and a Cardinal of the Roman Church* (London, 1890). In his dedication to Reverend William Lockhart, Meynell suggests that he led Newman out of the Anglican church and that Lockhart's conversion was a result of 'a chance encounter' with Milner's *The end of controversy* while a student at St. John's College.
39. *The Orthodox Journal and Catholic Monthly Intelligencer*, Vol.1 June 1813 to Vol. 8 Dec. 1820 [A new series was published after an interval].
40. *The Truthteller*, a weekly stamped newspaper for one year from 25 September 1824, and from October 1825 to April 1829 a weekly political pamphlet.
41. *O.J.*, 1 (1813), 12.
42. *Ibid.*, 8 (1820), 205f.
43. *Ibid.*, 12 (1830), 41.
44. *The Black Dwarf* (1817-1824).
45. *O.J.*, 7 (1819), 318.
46. *Ibid.*, 331.
47. *Ibid.*, 330.
48. *Ibid.*, 333.
49. *Ibid.*, 326.
50. *Ibid.*, 8 (1820), 131.
51. *The Catholic Advocate for Civil and Religious Liberty*, Dec. 1820 to July 1821.
52. *O.J.*, vol.12, Third series (1830), 367.
53. *The People's Advocate*, Jan. to Feb. 1822.
54. *The Catholic Miscellany*, Jan. 1822 to May 1830. Andrews edited the first volume.
55. In 1822-1823, Andrews wrote and published eighteenth pamphlets in support of a local Priest in Preston in dispute with a parson Sibson of Ashton.

56. see f.n. 40.  
 57. *The Truthteller*, 4 (1826), 253.  
 58. *Ibid.*, 4 (1826), 186.  
 59. *Ibid.*, 7 (1827), 9.  
 60. *Ibid.*, 14 (1829), 182.  
 61. *O.J.*, 12 (1830), 371.  
 62. *The British Liberator* (1831). A few issues only early in the year.  
 63. *Andrews' Constitutional Preceptor and Monthly Intelligencer* (London, 1831). Published for about six months.  
 64. William Howley, *A charge delivered to the clergy of the Diocese of London at the Visitation of July 1826* (London, 1826), 6.  
 65. Robert Southey, *The book of the Church* (London, 1824).  
 66. Charles Butler, *The book of the Roman Catholic Church* (London, 1825).  
 67. [Sydney Smith] *Two letters on the subject of the Catholics by Peter Plymley* (London, 1807). Reprinted, and supplemented with more letters.  
 68. William Cobbett, *A history of the Protestant Reformation in England and Ireland* (London, 1824-1827).  
 69. *Theory contradicted by fact; or, the asserted change in the principles of Roman Catholics refuted by their own words*, 2nd. edn. (London, 1827) 2.  
 70. For examples of reports of such meetings, see *The authenticated report of the discussion which took place in the Chapel of the Roman Catholic College at Downside* (London, 1834), and *Authenticated report of the discussion which took place between the Rev. John Venn and the Rev. James Waterworth, in St. Peter's School Room, Hereford* (Hereford, 1844).  
 71. E.M. Howse, *Saints in politics: 'The Clapham Sect' and the growth of freedom* (Toronto, 1952), 8.  
 72. *Report of the proceedings of the Midland Catholic Association, at their annual meeting...18 April 1826* (London, 1826), 4.

## THE IDEA OF NATIONALISM IN BELFAST IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Simon Davies

In October 1791, general discontent with the Irish Parliament led to the formation of the Society of United Irishmen in Belfast. The initiative for the founding of this organization came not, it is important to stress, from Wolfe Tone, but from a group of Belfast businessmen; it was as active members of an existing political club that they invited Tone to Belfast. Commerce and politics were energizing concerns of these founding fathers and their initial appeal was certainly to the Protestant middle class. The original members in the northern town were all Protestants, and, with the exception of the two outsiders, Tone and Thomas Russell, all Presbyterians (the Dublin Society was to have roughly 50% Catholic and Protestant participation).<sup>1</sup>

What were the ideas that these United Irishmen were keen to promote? They declared that they desired an equal representation of all the people of Ireland:

We have no national government. We are ruled by Englishmen and the servants of Englishmen, whose object is the interest of another country, whose instrument is corruption, and whose strength is the weakness of Ireland: and these men have the power and patronage of the country as means to seduce and subdue the honesty and spirit of her representatives in the legislature...<sup>2</sup>

As a result of this declaration, the following resolutions were proposed and carried at this first meeting:

- 1st. That the weight of English influence in the government of this country is so great as to require a cordial union among all the people of Ireland, to maintain that balance which is essential to the preservation of our liberties and the extension of our commerce.
- 2nd. That the sole constitutional mode by which this influence can be opposed is by a complete and radical reform of the representation of the people in parliament.
- 3rd. That no reform is just which does not include Irishmen of every religious persuasion.<sup>3</sup>

It is not my purpose to recount the subsequent history of the United Irish movement but rather to suggest why its birth should have taken place in the Presbyterian town of Belfast. Why did these northern Dissenters see themselves as the standard bearers proclaiming the national rights of Ireland?

In Ireland in the eighteenth century, where more than three-quarters of the population were Catholics and where members of the Established Church slightly outnumbered Dissenters, the denominational proportions were very different in the north of the island. As a result of the plantations, it has been reckoned that one could find 45% of the Anglicans and perhaps 99% of the Presbyterians of Ireland in Ulster alone. Parts of the province were the only areas where Protestants outnumbered Catholics with the Presbyterians being particularly dominant in the hinterland of the eastern seaboard. Prosperity was more evident in Ulster than in the other provinces of Ireland and particularly in the eastern counties. Accordingly, a healthy economy and Presbyterianism could be easily linked in people's minds.<sup>4</sup> The Belfast physician, Halliday, boasted in a letter to Lord Charlemont of 27 August 1791:

This town advances in size, improvement, and prosperity. Religion and luxury with us go hand in hand, no ordinary partnership.<sup>5</sup>

One can thus advance the view that Belfast, in its denominational composition and business life, occupied a unique position for a town of any size in Ireland at the time.

How then did the citizens of Belfast see themselves in relation to their fellow inhabitants of the island? The Presbyterians, just like the Catholics, were of course not entitled to the rights and privileges of the Protestant Anglican Ascendancy and had no direct access to the corridors of power. The corporation of the town was a self-elected body under the patronage of the Donegall family who in effect also nominated the two Belfast M.P.s. The Presbyterians of Belfast could therefore regard themselves, both on a theoretical and practical campaign plane, as disadvantaged, although not as badly off as those who, some at least, were coming to consider as their Catholic brethren. Furthermore, when they contemplated the utility of their economic contribution to the well-being of Ireland, they were doubtless entitled to feel even more disaffected.

Indeed, it is in the economic sphere that Ireland had justifiably seen itself as unfairly treated over the years. The Presbyterian businessmen of Belfast felt aggrieved at the constraints imposed on their trade by England's mercantilist policies which subordinated Irish to English interests. Their concerns and livelihood were not accorded due consideration in the Dublin parliament despite the events of 1782 and the establishment of legislative independence. This limited degree of independence had been brought about through the efforts of the

so-called "patriots", often a fairly fluid group but one which had fought in parliament for the constitutional rights of the distinct kingdom of Ireland against the encroachment of the Westminster government. Led by Grattan, the "patriots" were from Anglo-Irish backgrounds and were basically working for the benefit of the Protestant "nation", thereby representing a narrow sectional interest as interpreted by its elite.

The aspirations of Ireland to a separate voice and constitutional independence had been aired at the close of the seventeenth century by William Molyneux and in the early eighteenth century by Jonathan Swift—endeavours which, in the eyes of Wolfe Tone, would grant them a place in a Pantheon to be built by an Irish Republic.<sup>6</sup> Molyneux's *The Case of Ireland* (1698) was reprinted at least eleven times in the following century and became a frequent point of reference and support whenever Irishmen tried to refute Westminster claims of ascendancy. As a widely read manifesto, it gave powerful backing to anticolonialist and antimercantalist ideas.<sup>7</sup> Swift is of course a massively complex individual and it would be a brave or foolhardy person who claimed the ability to encapsulate unequivocally the Dean's attitudes to Ireland.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that in the *Drapier's Letters* Swift revealed himself as a staunch lover of liberty and advocate of the dignity of Ireland. In the third letter, he asks:

Were not the people of *Ireland* born as *Free* as those of *England*? How have they forfeited their Freedom? Is not their Parliament as fair a *Representative* of the *People* as that of *England*? And hath not their Privy Council as great or a greater Share in the Administration of Publick Affairs? Are they not Subjects of the same King? Does not the same Sun shine on them? And have they not the same *God* for their Protector? Am I a *Free-Man* in *England*, and do I become a *Slave* in six Hours by crossing the Channel?<sup>9</sup>

While in the fourth, *A Letter to the Whole People of Ireland*, he thunders:

For in *Reason*, all *Government* without the consent of the Governed is the very *Definition* of *Slavery*...<sup>10</sup>

Yet, despite the eloquence of these assertions, Swift, as Molyneux before him, was complaining at the abuses of the English government and his writings could not be construed as advancing claims for a separate and independent Irish identity.

Much nearer in time to the genesis of the Society of United Irishmen is the creation of the Volunteer movement. It was born out of the



necessity of strengthening the defences of Ireland, weakened by the commitment of so many troops to the war in America. At its inception, it was a Protestant armed movement which flourished in the north in 1778. There, in spite of the pro-American sympathies frequently expressed by the Presbyterians, hostility to the French was strong. The recognition of their status as defenders of the realm gave the Volunteers a flattering image of their own worth. Their readiness to perform their duties as soldiers enhanced their awareness of their rights as citizens. The intertwining of the military and the political may be considered as awakening a heightened self-consciousness of themselves as Irishmen actively engaged in the well-being of their nation. It is no surprise that the famous Ulster Volunteer Convention at Dungannon in 1782 should support the legislative independence of Ireland and offer albeit qualified approval of religious equality. One reads towards the end of an address voted to the "patriot" elements in the Irish Parliament:

We know our duty to our sovereign, and are loyal. We know our duty to ourselves, and are resolved to be free. We seek for our rights, and no more than our rights, and in so just a pursuit, we should doubt the being of a Providence, if we doubted of success.<sup>11</sup>

Although it would be unwise to extract a revolutionary message from an isolated passage, it does all the same convey a firm sense of the justice of the reformist cause.

The reformist cause had been encouraged by events abroad. The rebellion in America was bound to have an impact on Ulster when one considers that two-thirds of Irish emigration from 1717 to 1776 originated from the province.<sup>12</sup> The successful outcome of that revolt which involved some of the kith and kin of the northern Presbyterians offered much food for thought. Their knowledge of it through newspapers, letters, and word of mouth must surely have contributed to a sharper understanding of their own situation which was not colonial but that of a distinct nation harshly treated.<sup>13</sup> Certainly, toasts to Franklin and Washington were to be almost obligatory at radical dinners in Belfast. Furthermore, the United Irish newspaper, the *Northern Star*,<sup>14</sup> in its issue of 5 May 1792, contained a letter bemoaning the exodus of useful citizens to America:

What an accession of strength to America, what a loss to Ireland! Ireland is not half-peopled!...it is from English influence and ascendancy; it is from protestant *ascendancy* that protestants are flying...

The correspondent nevertheless understood the need to flee oppression to healthier climes.

Of more immediate impact was the French Revolution. The passionate support it received in Belfast and the colourful parades there commemorating the fall of the Bastille have often been noted by historians. "French principles" circulated widely in the north, and whereas France had formerly been mistrusted as a Catholic power, the revolutionary policies towards the church provoked a considerable reversal in attitudes. If radicals in France could shake the foundations of such an established state, surely Irishmen united should be capable of achieving some badly needed reforms.<sup>15</sup> Times were changing and the concrete examples of America and France lent welcome tactical support to claims for concessions.

However, backing for the campaign of the Irish dissidents came not merely from events abroad, but also from the writings of contemporaries, pre-eminently those of Thomas Paine. Part One of the *Rights of Man* appeared on 16 March 1791. In a letter dated 15 November, Paine was to claim that 16,000 copies had been sold in England and 40,000 in Ireland.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, at least seven Irish editions appeared in 1791-1792,<sup>17</sup> and it became, in the words of Wolfe Tone, "the Koran of Belfescu".<sup>18</sup> In the *Northern Star* of 25 April 1792, Part Two of Paine's work was offered for sale in the same advertizing column in different editions, one printed in Dublin at six pence halfpenny, one at Magee's in Belfast at six pence, while extracts were also to be found in the *Monthly Review*. The newspaper, on 4 April, had printed an imaginary dialogue between an aristocrat and democrat. The aristocrat enquires of his interlocutor whether he is an admirer of the "villain Tom Paine". The democrat replies that he is an admirer of "truth, and as Mr. Paine's writings carry conviction to my heart, I cannot help respecting him as a friend to mankind". When the aristocrat complains that Paine mocks people of his ilk, the democrat retorts:

When men of titles and great wealth pass their whole time in idle gratification and despicable pursuits, when the hereditary legislators of a country show no respect for public opinion, but treat the common people as if only sent into the world to promote their pleasures and approve their vices; whenever such enormities appear, the public will think with Mr. Paine.

In addition to the admiration for Paine, the democrat praises the French Revolution as 'the most glorious effort of mankind' and his consistently reasonable tone contrasts sharply with the aristocrat's irrational outbursts.

The reasons for Paine's appeal are obvious, for, if he is deficient as a political theorist, his tendency to picture man and society without

shades of grey make him an effective propagandist. In addition, his involvement in the American and French revolutions, his status as a disaffected Englishman, enhanced his credibility enormously. For the Belfast radical, Paine wrote from experience in plain, readable terms.

Yet, when all is said and done, I believe that it is the Presbyterian background which is of fundamental importance for understanding the attitudes and conduct of these middle-class radicals. True, the Dublin United Irishmen may have espoused comparable ideals, but they never formed such a tight-knit homogenous group. The Presbyterians in the north placed a great value on education, self-help, the organization of their community, and the more liberal New Light theology found increasing favour as the century advanced.<sup>19</sup> Presbyterian ministers and elders were prominent in the United Irish movement and must have granted it useful respectability. One of the early leaders of the Society, Samuel Neilson, who was one of the proprietors and also editor of the *Northern Star*, was a son of the manse and an elder of the Kirk.<sup>20</sup> Presbyterian ministers were educated in Scotland at this time and were thus exposed to the new enlightened ideas. It is worth recalling that one of the major figures of the Scottish Enlightenment, Francis Hutcheson, was an Irishman, and what is more, an Ulsterman who kept in regular contact with his fellow countrymen. He taught that the general good should be the aim of political association, advocated the right of resistance, and suggested that colonies could separate in their own interests.<sup>21</sup> These sentiments appear in his *System of Moral Philosophy* which circulated in manuscript in Ulster before its publication and was read by his Presbyterian friends, including Thomas Drennan, the father of the United Irishmen.<sup>22</sup> I would suggest that the impact and diffusion of Scottish thought in Ireland in general, and Ulster in particular, has not received the attention it merits. Indeed, to reinforce my assertion I can do no better than quote from an address of the United Societies of Belfast sent to the Delegates for Parliamentary Reform in Scotland in December 1792. There Scotland is hailed as being:

the asylum of independence, and equally renowned in arms and arts;...the modern nurse of literature and science, whose seminaries have supplied the world with statesmen, orators, historians, and philosophers;...whose penetrating genius, has forced its way into the repositories of nature, unveiled her hidden mysteries, and brought forward all her richest treasures for the healing of the nation!<sup>23</sup>

There is a further dimension to Belfast life which has gained insufficient coverage, that is the involvement of many of the future United Irishmen in the philanthropic and cultural activities of the

town.<sup>24</sup> They were actively concerned with the running of its Charitable Society and found work for the poorhouse children in the new cotton manufacture. Indeed, in 1790 Samuel Neilson was appointed treasurer of the Charitable Society. Two years previously, the Belfast Reading Society had been formed which, in 1792, changed its name to the Belfast Society for Promoting Knowledge. Its declared objectives were:

the collection of an extensive library, philosophical apparatus, and such productions of nature and art as tend to improve the mind, and excite a spirit of general enquiry.<sup>25</sup>

At a meeting of the Society on 27 January 1792, one finds resolutions passed advocating civil and religious toleration and freedom for all in Ireland.<sup>26</sup> The value of these activities for the future United Irishmen seems to me to be twofold. On the one hand they could see themselves pursuing enlightened ideals, on the other, it gave them experience of working together on at least fairly democratically elected committees.

It is therefore evident why Wolfe Tone should find the climate in Belfast so congenial and should feel so at home with the political activists there. Not only were they prepared to offer general support for his radical proposals, but they were also in a position of influence in their community unknown to their co-religionists in Dublin. Writing in his *Autobiography*, Tone claims:

The Dissenters of the north, and more especially of the town of Belfast, are, from the genius of their religion, and from the superior diffusion of political information among them sincere and enlightened republicans. They had ever been foremost in the pursuit of parliamentary reform...<sup>27</sup>

and:

...to the honour of the Dissenters of Belfast be it said, they were the first to reduce to practice their newly-received principles, and to show, by being just that they were deserving to be free.<sup>28</sup>

William Drennan, the Belfast Presbyterian, who was a leading member of the Dublin United Irishmen in the early 1790s while practising medicine there, exuded a sense of pride when he declared: 'Certainly it is the business of every true Irishman to cultivate the democratic spirit, which Presbyterians first infused in them, and which is the crime for which they will never be forgiven.'<sup>29</sup>

What then can we make of the idea of nationalism in late eighteenth-century Belfast?<sup>30</sup> Undoubtedly one may claim that one is dealing with perhaps the only time in the history of Ireland when a genuine attempt was made to promote the concept of the country as a



non-sectarian state, where political attitudes and loyalties were not dictated by denominational affiliations. For the Belfast radicals, religion was a matter for the conscience of the individual citizen and should in no way affect his political persuasions. Even if one accepts that their primary motivation was economic, and not some lofty abstract ideal, they nevertheless saw themselves as harbingers of a better world. The heady wine of their numerous dinners mingled with the heady stimulant of their enlightened beliefs. They caressed a flattering self-image of themselves as an enlightened elite in Ireland emancipating their Catholic brothers and bringing a longed-for dignity to what was now unquestionably their own country.<sup>31</sup> Their language was English, their reformed parliament would largely be derived from English institutions. Despite support for the harpers' festival in Belfast in 1792, for the 'national music' of Ireland, they did not gaze dewy-eyed into the Edenic mists of a Gaelic past, theirs was not a cultural nationalism.<sup>32</sup> On the contrary, theirs was to be a modern state, economically free and vibrant; they were part of the new Enlightenment sweeping Europe.<sup>33</sup> Whether they drew strength from the example of America and France, encouragement from the advance of progressive ideas, there is no doubt that excitement was in the air and opportunities were not to be missed. If their idea of one nation embracing all creeds and cultural identities seems naive to the modern critic, such a view derives from the arrogance of hindsight. Their enlightened ideals were to be tarnished in the sectarian nature of the 1798 rebellions and in the growth of the Orange Order. The Whig politician, Lord Charlemont, claimed in 1798, that Belfast 'must ever be esteemed our political metropolis' and in those all too brief years the town deserved its newly acquired epithet of being the Athens of the north.<sup>34</sup>

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1. R.B. McDowell, 'The personnel of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen, 1791-1794', *Irish Historical Studies*, 2(1942), 10-19.
2. R.R. Madden, *The United Irishmen, their lives and times*, 1st series, 2nd. edn. (London, 1857), 223.
3. Ibid.
4. R.B. McDowell, *Ireland in the age of imperialism and revolution 1760-1801* (Oxford, 1979), 155-156, 170.
5. *The manuscripts and correspondence of James, First Earl of Charlemont*, vol.2, 1784-1799, Historical Manuscripts Commission, 13th. Report, app., pt. VIII (London, 1894), 144.
6. *The autobiography of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, 2 vols., ed. B. O'Brien (Dublin, 1893), 2, 268; cf. 1, 26.
7. See Caroline Robbins, *The eighteenth-century commonwealthman* (Cambridge, 1959), 137-143. *The Case of Ireland* was reprinted in Belfast in 1776 as an overt comparison with events in America.

8. For recent assessments of this thorny issue, see David Nokes, 'The radical conservatism of Swift's Irish pamphlets', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 7, no.2 (1984), 169-176, and Joseph McMinn, 'A weary patriot: Swift and the formation of an Anglo-Irish identity', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 2 (1987), 103-113.
9. H. Davis ed., *The Drapier's Letters to the people of Ireland*, (Oxford, 1935), 40.
10. Ibid., 79.
11. J.C. Beckett, *The making of modern Ireland 1603-1923* (London, 1969), 222.
12. D.N. Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen, and revolutionary America, 1760-1820* (Dublin and Cork, 1981), 51. An Ulsterman, Francis Makemie (c.1658-1708), made a significant contribution to the growth of Presbyterianism. See John Barkley, *Francis Makemie of Ramelton: father of American Presbyterianism* (Belfast, 1981), and B.S. Schlenther ed., *The life and writings of Francis Makemie* (Philadelphia, 1971).
13. The text of the American Declaration of Independence appeared in the *Belfast Newsletter* of 27 August 1776.
14. I am preparing an article on the *Northern Star* illustrating its role as a vehicle for enlightened ideas in the 1790s.
15. For the relationship between France and Ireland at this time, see Marianne Elliott, *Partners in revolution: the United Irishmen and France* (New Haven & London, 1982).
16. R.R. Fennessy, *Burke, Paine and the Rights of Man: a difference of political opinion* (The Hague, 1963), 3; see also, 229-230.
17. Doyle, op.cit., 165.
18. *The autobiography of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, 1, 77. Henry Cooke was later to testify to the dissemination of Paine in Ulster: 'the works of Tom Paine and such writers were extensively put into the hands of the people: Paine's *Rights of man*, a political work, and *Age of reason*, a deistical one, were industriously circulated: I know it was very common to drop them on the road, and leave them at the door of the poor man, or push them under the door'. Cooke is quoted in J.R.R. Adams, *The printed word and the common man: popular culture in Ulster 1700-1900* (Belfast, 1987), 86. Adams also points out the prevalence of the political use of prophecies and millenarianism in the final years of the century (86-90).
19. A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Narrow Ground: aspects of Ulster 1609-1969* (London, 1977), 99. One should not, however, establish a necessary connection between heterodox theological views and political radicalism. David Miller has noted that orthodox and New Light ministers were implicated in almost equal numbers during the United Irish rebellions; see his, 'Presbyterianism and "modernization" in Ulster', *Past and Present*, 80 (Aug. 1968), 79. For a recent history of Presbyterianism in the province, see Peter Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism: the Historical Perspective 1610-1970* (Dublin, 1987).
20. John Barkley, *A short history of the Presbyterian church in Ireland* (Belfast, 1959) 38.
21. Robbins, op.cit., 185-196. Hutcheson was the originator of one of the most famous phrases of the Enlightenment; see Robert Shackleton, 'The greatest happiness of the greatest number: the history of Bentham's phrase', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth-Century*, XC (1972), 1461-1482.
22. W.R. Scott, *Francis Hutcheson* (Cambridge, 1900), 113-114.
23. *Belfast Politics* (Belfast, 1794), 102.
24. R.W.M. Strain, *Belfast and its Charitable Society* (Oxford, 1961), 94.
25. J. Magee, *The Linen Hall and the cultural life of Georgian Belfast* (Belfast, 1981), 3. For a general history of this surviving institution, see J. Anderson, *History of the Belfast Society for Promoting Knowledge* (Belfast, 1888). As yet, research does not

appear to have been conducted on the relationship of this society with comparable organizations in the rest of the British Isles. Roy Porter's stimulating article may be of value here: 'Science, Provincial Culture and Public Opinion in Enlightenment England', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 3, no.1 (1980), 20-46.

26. *Belfast Politics*, 4-5.
27. Op.cit., I, 46.
28. Ibid., 43.
29. D.A. Chart ed., *The Drennan Letters...1776-1819*, (Belfast, 1931), 212.
30. For general studies of nationalism in Ireland, see Sean Cronin, *Irish nationalism: the history of its roots and ideology* (Dublin, 1980), and D. George Boyce *Nationalism in Ireland* (London & Dublin, 1982)
31. The government was not unaware of the possible linking of Presbyterians and Catholics. Gerard O'Brien notes that 'in mid-October 1791 Hobart personally explained to Grenville the risk (which Westmoreland had long suspected) of an alliance between the Catholics and the increasingly unruly Dissenters of Belfast', *Anglo-Irish politics in the age of Grattan and Pitt* (Dublin, 1987), 162.
32. One reads in a column headed "National Music" in the Northern Star of 28 April 1792: 'The preservation of our ancient music must appear to be a matter of no small concern to every lover of the antiquities of Ireland...When we think of the British commemoration of a single artist, with what ardour should it inspire us to revive and perpetuate the music of a nation?' In *Belfast Politics* (p.30), there is a brief commentary on the harpers' gathering, with the following observation: 'Wales and Ireland have a national music, while England has none...'
33. In the *Northern Star* of 5 May 1792, we learn of a dinner held two days previously to commemorate the revolution in Poland. Amidst the numerous toasts, we find one proposed as follows: 'May Philosophy enlighten all Nations and form the whole into one vast family'. The connection between the Belfast radicals and their counterparts in Britain has never been seriously investigated. It does not enter, except marginally, into the purview of Albert Goodwin's *The Friends of Liberty* (London, 1979).
34. *Manuscripts and Correspondence...*, 2, 110.

## VARIETIES OF CANDOUR: SCOTTISH AND ENGLISH STYLE

Martin Fitzpatrick

In a recent study of religion in Scotland, Callum Brown has suggested that Augustan religion, noted for its spiritual coolness and tolerance, spread northwards from England during the eighteenth century. This led to the formation of the Moderate Party which dominated the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland from the 1750s until 1833, and during that long period held the evangelical Popular Party in check.<sup>1</sup> The Moderate Party played a major role in the Scottish Enlightenment as has been demonstrated by Richard Sher in his seminal study of its leaders,<sup>2</sup> and its ascendancy would appear to provide grist for the mill of those Scottish intellectuals whose low evaluation of the Scottish Enlightenment is conditioned by the notion that it is a product of Anglicisation.<sup>3</sup> It is not the purpose of this paper to suggest that that particular prejudice is unfounded, but it will, in a modest way, attempt to show that the relationship between the ideas of the Scottish Moderate clergy and enlightened English religious ideas is complex and, to a degree, reciprocal.

It was not only Anglican religion which influenced Scottish Presbyterianism. English Dissent, especially Presbyterian, played a significant role in shaping Scottish religious ideas. The Scottish Universities and English Dissenting Academies had much in common, and English Dissenters would sometimes complete their education at a Scottish University, many of them at Glasgow on scholarships financed by Daniel Williams, and subsequently by the trust fund established in accordance with his will.<sup>4</sup> When, in the second half of the eighteenth century, English Dissent split into evangelical and rational Dissenting wings, it would appear that this fissure paralleled that in Scotland between the Moderates and the Popular Party. This was, however, far from being the case. Rational Dissent was in the van of radical enlightenment thinking, and in the late eighteenth century the differences between the pragmatic, moderate Scottish Enlightenment and the reformist Rational Dissenting brand of the English Enlightenment grew. On the major issues of the day their leaders would find themselves on different sides of the fence.<sup>5</sup> Progress was undoubtedly their shared aspiration but their strategies for attaining it differed considerably. A special insight into such differences is provided by the correspondence of a Moderate Scottish clergyman, James Wodrow, youngest son of Robert Wodrow the historian, and an English Rational Dissenting banker, Samuel Kenrick, son of John Kenrick of Wynne Hall, Ruabon,



near Wrexham. They were both educated at Glasgow University where they formed a friendship for life. After Kenrick's early years, this was sustained almost exclusively by correspondence and that correspondence has in large measure survived.<sup>6</sup>

Samuel Kenrick went to Glasgow University in 1743 and took his M.A. in 1747. In 1745 his father died suddenly and Samuel was looked after by Rev. Henry Millar of Neilston to whom he was related through his mother. The intention appears to have been that Samuel would go in for the church, but this was not to be. At some stage, Samuel, impressed by the qualities of James Wodrow and his fellow students at Glasgow, decided that he was unfitted for the ministry.<sup>7</sup> In 1750 he became tutor to the two children of James Milliken of Milliken, Kilbarchan, Renfrewshire. He took his duties very seriously<sup>8</sup> and in the early 1760s accompanied in turn his charges to the continent. Both trips were traumatic for the elder Milliken died of a fever at Venice and although the younger son, Alexander, was accompanied by a medical doctor, his uncle, Dr. Spens, he died at Portsmouth on his return. With these tragic deaths, Kenrick took leave of the Millikens and settled in Bewdley, Worcestershire, as a partner of his brother in a banking and tobacconist and snuff making business.<sup>9</sup>

Apart from the two grand tours, Samuel Kenrick had lived in Scotland from 1743 until 1765. During that period he began to correspond with his college friend, James Wodrow, who in 1759 became minister of the Presbyterian congregation at Stevenston in Ayr, where he was to remain for the rest of his life. Although the correspondence began in earnest when Samuel settled in England they had already exchanged some forty letters by then. For the first ten years that Samuel was in Bewdley their correspondence was irregular.<sup>10</sup> This can be attributed to Samuel's involvement in setting his business on a good footing, for his brother was not a good partner and Samuel was not a natural businessman.<sup>11</sup> But from 1774 the correspondence became much more regular and it lasted until Wodrow's death in 1810. The letters cover almost all the sorts of topics that close friends would talk about at sometime or other, but the strongest bond between them was intellectual.<sup>12</sup> Yet, devoted as they were to the cause of enlightenment and especially to civil and religious liberty, the two friends found it difficult to agree with each other on many contemporary political issues. These disagreements are quite explicit in their letters and one might even suggest that they became important to their friendship. Their most prolonged and serious disagreement was over the conflict with the American colonies. Kenrick, fervently pro-American, admitted to

plaguing his friend with his opinions.<sup>13</sup> One might conclude that Wodrow became mightily sick of his friend's pertinacity but there is slender warrant for this in their letters.<sup>14</sup> At any rate, despite the hurts they may have felt about their conflicting views, they explored them continually and vigorously in their letters. Their correspondence overall provides powerful evidence of the strength of their attachment to the doctrine of candour. Without that compelling belief their friendship would probably have collapsed under the weight of their disagreements. It is their common concern to explore the truth as they see it and to articulate it as fully and persuasively as possible that makes their correspondence such a valuable and unusual historical source. But if both friends were committed to the candid expression of their views in private, their concepts of candid public controversy and assessments of its value differed considerably, and it is those differences which will be explored in what follows in the hope that they will shed some light upon the nature and complexities of Scottish Moderatism and of its relationship with English Rational Dissent.

In their correspondence both Wodrow and Kenrick acknowledge their indebtedness to Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University from 1729 until his untimely death in 1746 and to William Leechman (1706-1785), who in 1743 became Professor of Natural Theology also at Glasgow, and subsequently in 1761 became Principal. A few years after his graduation in 1724, Leechman had attended Hutcheson's lectures and he became his friend and admirer. After his death he assisted the philosopher's son in the publication of his major work, *A system of moral philosophy* (1755), for which he wrote an account of his life and writings.<sup>15</sup> According to James Martineau, 'the broad theology of Leechman and the ethics of Hutcheson...relaxed the severe Calvinism of Glasgow'.<sup>16</sup> Both undoubtedly helped to shape the character of the Scottish clergy and Leechman's influence stretched over almost half a century. In the view of Anand Chitnis he 'heavily influenced a good quarter of ordained ministers in the Age of Enlightenment'.<sup>17</sup> He was undoubtedly the dominant influence upon Wodrow and Kenrick, and when he died Wodrow was chosen to write his life and edit his works. Leechman believed profoundly in the civilizing role of Christianity, which was for him a rational religion and a superior form of natural religion.<sup>18</sup> His sermons constantly stress the virtue of the Christian life. He thought that 'moral excellence is the chief glory of the Divine Nature itself'.<sup>19</sup> In his moral teaching he stressed the value of moderation. The moderate man whose passions and desires were kept in check by his rational religion was 'a man at peace with himself'.<sup>20</sup> That peace derived from

the harmony which he had achieved between his conduct and his beliefs. Leechman was anxious not to divorce conduct from opinion. Freedom of inquiry and liberty of thought should not be confused with licentiousness.<sup>21</sup> The moral man was therefore one whose passions were regulated 'by the rules of true moderation, of pure virtue and genuine religion'<sup>22</sup> and whose search for the truth was carried out with 'candour and impartiality'.<sup>23</sup> Leechman was profoundly optimistic that moderation need not be purchased at the expense of true Christian values. He argued, for example, that genuine politeness was not a matter of artificial airs and graces, of social rules and prohibitions, rather it arose from an interior Christian conviction.<sup>24</sup> Good manners need not involve compromises with truth and integrity, rather they exemplified the way in which Christianity civilized mankind and produced virtuous citizens. This belief found expression in an Arminian theology and an emphasis upon good works as an essential Christian duty: 'the main part of the duty of a Christian...lies in doing good, in promoting the happiness of others to the utmost of his power'.<sup>25</sup> Good works, however dutiful, also followed naturally from being a Christian, from what Leechman called 'a good heart'.<sup>26</sup> Moderate religion, while eschewing the extremes of enthusiasm and superstition, sought to infuse its ideals of humility, sobriety, rational conduct and sound judgement with warm piety and genuine sympathy. It was an exacting combination of Protestant spirituality and enlightened truth-seeking.<sup>27</sup> Wodrow imbibed its principles thoroughly. He much admired those who sought rational explanations for Christ's conduct, yet he himself kept a non-dogmatic faith. Though he was Kenrick's superior in theological matters he resolutely refused to pronounce on the central and contentious issue of Christ's mission. His emphasis on Christian tolerance, founded on the acceptance of human limitations in understanding the workings of the divine mind and on the desire to remain on good terms with one's neighbour, led him to interpret the doctrine of candour differently from Kenrick.

There were two main aspects of the doctrine of candour as understood by the Scottish Moderate clergy, namely an obligation to seek the truth and state it fairly and impartially, and a desire to avoid matters which were too contentious to be discussed reasonably. The potential conflict between the two was mitigated by the emphasis on virtuous conduct rather than dogma, and by the belief that true Christianity could not be contentious, for, in Leechman's words, 'it produces a pleasing composure and serenity of soul, which had the most friendly influence on the best exercise of our rational faculties.'<sup>28</sup> Wodrow, in tune with his mentor, praised the Socinians for emphasizing

the example of Christ 'as a motive to virtue' but he remained an agnostic upon the question of Christ's relationship with the Godhead. He wrote to Kenrick, 'it is one of the few theological points about which after sufficient enquiry I have formed no decided opinions. Like many other disputed points, it is of little consequence to Christianity.'<sup>29</sup> He was deeply critical of the foremost modern Socinian, Joseph Priestley, and he found that those who avowed Socinianism were liable to contentiousness; their candid enquiry degenerated into controversy. He thought Priestley had a 'bee in his bonnet', and he was sorry that it was he who had written on the 'grand subject' of the history of the corruptions of Christianity. He hoped that it would have been,

treated by some writer of as much learning and judgement and liberality as Dr. Priestley but with much more leizure and more Candour, that is less attachment to his own nostrums or prejudices and more gentleness to those of others.<sup>30</sup>

For Wodrow there were always occasions when silence was most appropriate; candour should not operate independently of prudence. One should be wary of controversy, for it aroused an anti-Christian spirit of bigotry and persecution which moderation and modest persuasion sought to combat. Yet, as he discovered in the case of his friend, Dr. William M'Gill, the application of this pragmatic doctrine of candour could be extremely problematical.

William M'Gill learned the wisdom of Scottish Moderatism the hard way. He was almost a neighbour of Wodrow being minister of the second Presbyterian church in the town of Ayr. As a minister he was much respected, but he had his enemies for he was a man of known liberal views. In particular, his attitude towards the atonement may be loosely described as Socinian. For him the crucifixion was an example and inspiration to those seeking God's truth and salvation. He believed that:

The oblation of Christ's body on the Cross, will not benefit his followers, unless they be duly influenced by considering the doctrinal instruction it contains and the moral pupose it serves....if we do not hearken to the words of CHRIST, and keep his commandments, we can neither be reconciled to GOD by his death, nor saved by his life.<sup>31</sup>

Wodrow was prepared to assist M'Gill in the publication of such a contentious doctrine even though he feared the possibility of prosecution in the church courts. M'Gill it seems was in some financial difficulties having invested his wife's 'portion' in the Ayr Bank which had collapsed. He had a large family, his health was poor and he was not expected to live long. His book was intended as an insurance for his



family. Wodrow sympathized with this and when an Edinburgh bookseller proved too timid to publish his work he sought Kenrick's help and advice. His letter of 22 October 1784 is typical in that it shows him wrestling rather uneasily with rival considerations: his fears about publishing the work and his determination to help M'Gill. He informed his English friend that M'Gill's treatise on the death of Christ was ready for the press, 'though it may not be published for years'. It was too weighty to send; instead he sent a copy of the contents and some of his short works. He was not hopeful for its publication, finding the attitude of Lord Hailes, who was associated with the Moderate literati, particularly discouraging, and he feared that 'the climate of Scotland... was too hot to bear such an open publication.'<sup>32</sup> Although he himself had not read the whole work, he was impressed by 'the execution' which he thought 'much superior' to anything he had read on the subject and believed that there was 'little obnoxious' in the work except for some of the notes which he found too strident and which he advised M'Gill to 'suppress altogether or soften', for he disapproved 'of the bitter spirit of controversy in all parties'.<sup>33</sup> On balance, it appeared that M'Gill's greatest heresy was that of omission, but that did not make it any easier to decide on the appropriate manner of publication. In the strictest confidence, Wodrow asked Kenrick for his opinions about the work and for advice about publication. One option was to publish it anonymously; he was against that for he thought it more honest and honourable to publish openly. He also believed that such was M'Gill's reputation in Scotland that it would sell better with his name appended to it. This was in spite of his nervousness about publishing the work, a nervousness apparently shared by M'Gill for he had given Wodrow permission to show the contents of the work and 'a sermon or two' only to Kenrick and one or two of his friends and not to any of Wodrow's Scottish friends.<sup>34</sup> He was not too pleased to hear that Kenrick intended to solicit the opinions of Joseph Priestley not only because he had reservations about Priestley's scholarship but also because he did not like his dogmatic manner. Ironically in the light of subsequent events, he shared all the sorts of doubts about Priestley which one would expect from a Scottish Moderate clergyman, and he was adamant that his writings should not appear with Priestley's imprimatur:

I admire the variety and vigour of his talents, and believe with Mr. Kenrick that he loves truth, but he does not seem to look at her with that respect and modesty which becomes one who sees through a glass darkly; on the contrary he pushes boldly forward into her most secret recesses and I fear often hugs an illusion in place of her.<sup>35</sup>

Like Wodrow, he believed that his polemical manner harmed the cause he intended to serve. However, he did take Priestley's advice that his work should be published by subscription in Scotland. Kenrick tried to find subscribers in England with limited success, but between 700 and 800 subscribed from Scotland, which meant that with an edition of a thousand copies M'Gill was not out of pocket.<sup>36</sup>

When M'Gill's *The death of Christ* was in the press in the summer of 1786, Wodrow was still fearful of its reception. He reported that 'the orthodox at Edinburgh and Glasgow have taken alarm already and are impatient to see it.' Leechman's expectation was that the fires of persecution had been permanently extinguished, while Lord Hailes, expressing the greater caution of the Moderate literati of Edinburgh, thought that that he was deceived and that they could 'flame out as high as ever'. Wodrow lacked the confidence of his beloved teacher and thought that 'there was no foretelling what would happen'.<sup>37</sup> Initially the signs supported Leechman. Wodrow's discussion of the reception of the work in his letter of 9 January 1787 was thoroughly relaxed. At the author's request, he had sent him comments on his work 'with a view to a second edition' which he hoped would soon be needed. It had been well received by the laity and 'the moderate clergy' in his part of the country, though he had heard that elsewhere it was raising a few hackles. Yet, when it had been denounced by a clergyman in Kilmarnock, he had been faced with a request from some of his hearers for his own copy, since they could not obtain a single one in town. All in all, Wodrow thought that 'the book though wrote with that honest and decent freedom becoming the cause of truth, was as inoffensive as you can well imagine', and though the 'high party' were much offended by it, the wiser old heads amongst them would restrain the young bigots and so avert the risk of failing in the court of the General Assembly and suffering the 'censure of being found slanderous'.<sup>38</sup> But there was a price to pay for the toleration of M'Gill's work which was that he should not be drawn into controversy by defending it against the abuse of its critics. He had a powerful ally in the senior Presbyterian Minister in Ayr, Dr. William Dalrymple, who had been Moderator of the General Assembly in 1781. In the introduction to his *History of Christ* (1787), he commended the ideas of his colleague. Dalrymple, Wodrow and M'Gill's other friends amongst the Moderate Clergy had, in a sense, a special obligation to protect him, for they had commented on the manuscript of the work, suggesting emendations to those parts which might appear contentious or give provocation, and advised him on the timing and the method of publication. Such support guaranteed M'Gill protection from the Popular Party, however much its adherents might

rail against him, so long as he remained content to ride out the storm. That he failed to do so is perhaps indicative of the breakdown of the moderate consensus which so much represented the Scottish Enlightenment in the first two decades of George III's reign. That consensus weakened partly because the issues concerning toleration and liberty became both sharper and more clearly related as the the reign wore on.<sup>39</sup> At any rate, it was the celebration of the Glorious Revolution which caused the trouble. This is how Wodrow described what happened:

[Dr. Magill] had no thought of publishing [his sermon on the advantages of the Glorious Revolution] but received an unexpected and unprovoked attack of the most virulent kind from one of his orthodox neighbours Mr. Peebles minister of the new town of Air who published his two sermons of the 5th of November and in six or eight pages and some notes falls bloodily on the Dr.'s book whom he classes with Gibbon as an adversary to Christianity and upon the great body of his own brethren even those called the Moderate Clergy of Scotland as a set of base parricides and perjured traitors for supporting patronage and preaching and writing directly contrary to their subscription. It was wonderful how he could think of patching in such things in a thanksgiving sermon. This however has roused the Dr.'s spirit who was unmoved by all the abuse that was cast upon him in the pamphlets of the Seceding and Relief brethren and from the pulpits of the established clergy. He has added an appendix much larger than his sermon consisting of observations on that passage of Peebles and a very masterly piece of controversy it is. There is a mixture of mildness and keenness which cuts like a razor and I had no conception that the Dr. had such talents for controversy. He did not write me of his intention until this pamphlet was in the press otherwise I would have dissuaded him from entering the lists with such a contemptible adversary though it would have been to no purpose. I disapprove of the spirit of controversy yet if it be justifiable at all it is in self defence. I am not without apprehension that it will provoke the whole party and draw on a prosecution of the book in the church courts. Yet this in your views and in the purposes of providence will do good.<sup>40</sup>

Wodrow's apprehensions proved justified and the Moderate clergy had to fight hard in the next few years to protect M'Gill and his family from ruination. All this might have been prevented if M'Gill had been more prudent. Wodrow's belief that candour could not survive in a climate of fierce debate proved correct. There were, however, those who thought otherwise including Kenrick. For him, candour was not antithetical to controversy, rather controversy should be conducted in a spirit of candour and, if so, it would be beneficial to mankind. He was undoubtedly influenced by Leechman's optimism about the growing influence of enlightenment but even more by Joseph Priestley's rather

rugged interpretation of the doctrine of candour. This was clearly stated in the introduction to the first volume of the *Theological Repository*, founded by him in 1769, in which he solicited 'the freest objections to natural and revealed religion' adding that 'nothing that is new shall be rejected, if it be expressed in decent terms'.<sup>41</sup> Confidence of this sort made Wodrow nervous for it tended to eliminate all prudential aspects of candour and optimistically left the result to an all-wise providence. Priestley himself was not always the best advertisement for candid controversy. He tended to take his tone from his opponent and as all enlightened Scotsmen knew, he forgot his own norms of decency when, in 1774, he attacked the Scottish Common Sense philosophers. Priestley subsequently regretted the manner of his attack, although he continued to hope that it had 'served the cause of free enquiry and truth'.<sup>42</sup> M'Gill, despite his reservations about Priestley already noted, was impressed by the *Theological Repository* which he cited with approval in his *Death of Christ*, and he eventually answered his critics in the manner of Priestley.<sup>43</sup> Kenrick, too, had his reservations about the contentious scientist but he shared his optimism about the progress of truth, an optimism which like that of Priestley was proof against the worst catastrophe because it rested on the twin pillars of revelation and reason. Priestley might on occasion be pessimistic about man's imperviousness to reason but he never lost his faith in the wise operations of providence.<sup>44</sup> Initially Kenrick's support for Priestley was intellectual. He read Hartley and Priestley and was influenced by their necessitarian philosophy. But in 1780 Priestley came to live in Birmingham and Kenrick got to know him. Like many of his contemporaries he was impressed by his openness, amiability and plain speaking. Although he was not an indiscriminating supporter of Priestley, and accepted that on occasion his works alienated more than they persuaded, he nevertheless followed him in believing that truths were better frankly expressed than kept to oneself. They were not for the *cognoscenti* alone. Progress depended on the publication and propagation of ideas, for only through free enquiry and public discussion would true ideas ultimately prevail. Defending Priestley's *Letter to Pitt* (1787), which he accepted was 'injudicious' and which led some to believe that he had taken leave of his senses, he wrote that he believed that the cause, the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, would win in the end. In an illuminating parallel, he compared the contemporary reaction to Priestley to that of Festus to Paul, who judged him mad 'when he spoke words of truth and of a sound mind'.<sup>45</sup> Here Kenrick spoke as an English Rational Dissenter. Doctrinally heterodox and theoretically beyond the law, Rational Dissenters were intent on recovering the true Christianity of the early Church. Through the



application of reason to revelation they thought they could bring the Reformation to its completion. The more difficulties they encountered in this task the more they felt their position akin to the early Christians and the more fervently did they believe that the truth would prevail. This was very much in keeping with the growing belief in the triumph of enlightenment, which was not simply a secular process but providentially ordained. As Richard Price put it, 'All doctrines really sacred must be clear and incapable of being opposed with success'.<sup>46</sup> This was a sentiment which Kenrick very much shared, and it explains why he did not feel apprehensive about M'Gill's defence of his work. At first he could only react to Wodrow's account of the controversy and to his friend's prognostications about the course events would take. In doing so one can see how skilled the friends had become about agreeing to disagree:

I entirely agree with you about controversy. It sours the temper and unhinges the mind when it becomes personal, and is the mark of a vain and a little mind.... Yet I still say it is all right and will in the end produce the peaceable fruits of truth and righteousness to the honour of God.<sup>47</sup>

The 'vain and little mind' he was referring to was of course that of Peebles and not M'Gill. Kenrick continued to be optimistic about the outcome even when Wodrow in his next letter informed him of the clamour which M'Gill had raised against himself and how a clandestine manoeuvre of his enemies had led to proceedings against him on a heresy charge being instituted in the Synod of Ayr and Glasgow. However, Wodrow expected that the 'wisdom and moderation' of the General Assembly would assert itself and 'give a proper check to the zeal of the synod'.<sup>48</sup> He included with his letter the relevant works of M'Gill and two of his assailants, Peebles and Robertson, though he implied that Kenrick would be better off without the little bundle. Kenrick's response was enthusiastic. He did not regard the controversy as a little local quarrel blown up out of all proportion. It was not, as Wodrow had suggested, like the bickering of Kenrick's neighbouring clergymen one of whom had become an evangelical, rather it was about 'the noblest of subjects, the rights of conscience and private judgement'. M'Gill's defence of these important rights was 'spirited, acute and solid' and undoubtedly would be beneficial. He wrote,

Every impartial lover of truth and religious and civil liberty as dictated by reason and confirmed by our holy religion must value it—in proportion as bigots and must shrink before it; and the greater strength of truth it carries will be more sure to rouse the carnal powers of virulence and animosity which like fire, on the rude elements of nature will separate the dross from the ore and bring out the pure gold.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, while Wodrow regretted the appearance of M'Gill's tract, Kenrick looked on it with pleasure and admiration, confident of its value in the cause of truth. He was convinced of the efficacy of confronting the forces of bigotry and persecution. Wodrow, like a good Scottish Moderate believed that prejudice could only be laid if careful precautions were taken to ensure that enlightenment had every advantage available to it and that even then it should advance with circumspection. The publication of the *Death of Christ* fulfilled these requirements despite the trepidation felt at the time by M'Gill's friends. The publication of M'Gill's sermon with its justificatory appendix did not. What followed after that injudicious act was for Wodrow an exercise in damage limitation and as such it was a modest success; if not a decisive victory for the cause of toleration it was at least the sort of minor step forward which eroded the power of bigots over the people and which helped to civilize mankind. In that sense, despite M'Gill's foolhardiness, the outcome was not without satisfaction to Wodrow. Kenrick and the Rational Dissenters despite their optimism about controversy were less pleased at the result. Yet it took a good deal to dim the light of Kenrick's enthusiasm. To a degree, it was enhanced by defeat, for the dismal present only served to brighten his future expectations. As secretary for the Worcestershire Dissenters, he had played a minor part in the campaign for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. His enthusiasm for the cause was unbounded and even when the Dissenters were crushingly defeated in the Commons on their third attempt in March 1790, he was not cowed. He sent Wodrow a copy of the resolutions of the meeting of the Worcestershire Dissenters in September 1790 in which they thanked 'all the friends of civil and religious liberty...for every exertion they have made on this occasion, remembering "THAT NO EFFORT CAN BE LOST"'.<sup>50</sup> Wodrow could not share these rising expectations for the cause of liberty. He was suffering his own disappointments in attempting to gain Scottish relief from the Test Act and he sensed the developing reaction to the French Revolution. His own little sally into politics had only confirmed his long held views about the difficulty of improving mankind when the temptations to conform to the ways of a corrupt world were manifold. Whereas in France the spirit of reformation and improvement had gone abroad and would, he hoped, produce permanent results, in Britain the reverse seemed to be the case. He noted sadly,

your writers bold and able as they are, are yet but a small and a very small party. Their writings are but a spurt in comparison to the operation of other causes especially the influence of posts and pensions and the independent part of the nation numerous as they are have neither the understanding to feel nor the virtue to follow the influence of these



admirable writings. Nil desperandum however de republica. Their influence will be slow and I hope sure. I see and rejoice in the very same prospects that you do but I see them at a far greater distance.<sup>51</sup>

That letter could serve as an epitaph on the differences between the two friends. Moderate as Wodrow was he still had the wider cause of liberty at heart. He did not fight shy of supporting campaigns such as those for Burgh reform and relief from the Test Act which might be conceived as threatening the consensus of the Moderate Scottish Enlightenment.<sup>52</sup> But he consistently refused to be carried away by the great libertarian issues of the time. His religion which directed attention onto man's behaviour and which led him to reflect on the mysterious ways of providence provided the core of his Moderatism. It led him to be cautious in his expectations and pragmatic in his attitude towards politics. Why did not his friend think in the same way?

Temperamentally the two friends differed. Kenrick was an optimist who suffered from bouts of depression; Wodrow a pessimist who suffered from mild doses of optimism. He kept on a more even keel than his friend. Leechman had taught them that progress did not occur naturally but depended upon the assistance of providence, but for Wodrow the divine will was much more inscrutable than it was for Kenrick. To a degree, their differing viewpoints were conditioned by their differing situations. It was convenient for a moderate clergyman not to become embroiled in doctrine, and it was easier for a banker to expect clergy to act according to their consciences. Undoubtedly, too, things looked different from the north and south sides of Hadrian's Wall. Kenrick quickly imbibed the more radical attitudes of Rational Dissent with its strong current of sympathy for those who were regarded as oppressed. Wodrow early on registered his disapproval of the tendency of English Dissenters to be carried 'along with every thing that has the least appearance of liberty'.<sup>53</sup> Yet Kenrick with his strong Scottish connections would not have felt out of place in English Dissent if he had adopted a more cautious attitude towards change. The Dissenting Academies and the Scottish Universities had much in common.<sup>54</sup> If he had sat at the feet of William Enfield at the Warrington Academy, he would have been presented with a way of looking at things not dissimilar from that of Leechman. In the advertisement to his *Biographical Sermons*, Enfield stated that moral instruction was 'the chief end of preaching' and that he had therefore deliberately 'avoided the discussion of controverted questions'.<sup>55</sup> He distrusted controversy, believing that the best way to combat prejudice was by moderate conduct, by preaching the essential truths of religion which Protestants had in common and by hoping that error would 'die away without

notice'.<sup>56</sup> From such a viewpoint, the English liberal Dissenters had as much cause as Scottish Moderate Clergy to desire the perpetuation of the status quo with gentle amelioration where possible. It was not simply being English and Dissenting that made Kenrick's outlook different. Yet it has to be admitted that Enfield's brand of moderate reasonable catholic Dissent, very much in the earlier tradition of Philip Doddridge, though it contributed much to Rational Dissent was pushed aside in the late eighteenth century by a more doctrinally heterodox and radical variant as formulated by men like Joseph Priestley, Richard Price, Theophilus Lindsey and John Jebb. Such men were immensely encouraged by the success of the cause of liberty in America, the gains for toleration in Europe and the general increase of enlightenment. They read the signs of the age that they lived in to mean that age-old prejudices and superstitions, and the corrupt established churches and despotic regimes which perpetuated them, were finally crumbling. For some of them such as Priestley and, to a degree Price, their optimism had an apocalyptic dimension.<sup>57</sup> At any rate, they were determined to act out their part by the candid proclamation of the truth as they saw it and the exercise of their energies in the cause of liberty.<sup>58</sup> The enthusiastic Kenrick was very susceptible to their optimistic interpretations of current events and to their expectation that the powers of good would soon triumph completely over the powers of darkness. He had read in Hartley and Priestley of the evidence drawn from revelation to support predictions that reason would soon overcome the forces of unreason and, at least from the American Revolution on, he tended to view events in such terms. Wodrow did not share his general belief that the forces for truth were locked in a final combat with those of error and he noted in the case of the American struggle the resulting simplification of issues: the over-optimistic assessment of American virtue and the pessimistic gloom about the vicious and ruinous state of the mother country.<sup>59</sup> This fundamental difference about the way progress should be sought and actually occurs may be finally illustrated by looking at the conclusion of the M'Gill affair.

In the circumstances, the result of the M'Gill affair was mildly satisfying to Wodrow, but he had to persuade his friend that the forces of darkness had not triumphed and that they were not more prevalent in Scotland than England. His hope that the General Assembly would be able to put a stop to proceedings against M'Gill was not fulfilled because it coincided with the politicking over the lucrative office of principal clerk and so the matter was referred for inquiry to the Presbytery of Ayr. This was an unfortunate turn of events since the Presbytery included some of M'Gill's enemies amongst the ministers and the 'country elders' whom

he described as 'the rotten part of our constitution'. There was a possibility that stalling tactics and the election of new elders might see M'Gill through. But they did not. Wodrow's letters record how he did his best to seek more favourably disposed elders but found the Moderate establishment was lukewarm and timid in defending itself. The Presbytery prepared a fifty page document showing the passages from M'Gill's works which were 'contrary to the word of God and the confession of faith.' There followed a stormy synod at Glasgow after which M'Gill was given time to prepare his answers. Wodrow's language in describing M'Gill's enemies was stronger than usual. They were 'a desperate faction' engaged in a 'furious persecution', 'fools and bigots' who would at least be defeated at the bar of public opinion.<sup>60</sup> Whether this was so or not, they were eventually checked at the bar of the General Assembly. A compromise was reached in which proceedings against M'Gill were dropped on his apology. In Wodrow's view, this was the best that could have been hoped for:

The truce or accomodation of Magill's prosecution though it did not please me yet gave much satisfaction to the leaders of our church and indeed to all sensible men in both parties at the same time great offence to the bigots and zealots.<sup>61</sup>

For a while there was even a danger that the prosecution would be revived, but that soon receded, perhaps because of the growing concern with the issue of the Test Act. None the less, Kenrick was deeply disappointed by the outcome. Taking up Wodrow's bitter comments about bigotry, he had already cast M'Gill in a heroic mold, a latter day boy David taking on the forces of fanaticism. He professed to be glad that their fires were burning freely and openly, for in that way they would be quenched the sooner. The spirit of 'liberty and free enquiry', he felt sure, 'was abroad and defeating far more powerful enemies than 'an untutored ill advised mob headed by the lowest and most despicable' ministers of the Kirk, and he foresaw in truly apocalyptic terms that,

this contest will...soon bring down your ragged remnant of the old harlots peticoat of creeds and subscriptions and establish christianity upon its only true and solid basis—THE BIBLE.<sup>62</sup>

Yet he knew that predicting the millennium was not an exact science and that things might not come to pass in the way he hoped. He reluctantly conceded that France and Spain might soon become more advanced in civil and religious liberty than Scotland and, as for England, he admitted that it was a complete puzzle to him why such an enlightened nation should withhold justice from the Dissenters. But even when candidly thinking aloud to his friend, he refused to give way to pessimism. In due course, the wisdom of providence would reveal

itself, and, in the case of M'Gill, he expected that to be soon for he believed that he would win a 'complete victory'.<sup>63</sup> Imagine his dismay and that of fellow Rational Dissenters when he learned that he had 'fainted in the day of trial'. Thomas Belsham, in a sermon on *The Importance of truth and the duty of making an open profession of it* preached before the patrons of the new Dissenting Academy in Hackney, warned his audience that their expectations for the imminent completion of the Reformation were not likely to be fulfilled for,

The difficulties attending a public profession of obnoxious principles even in these times of comparative light and moderation are so great, that it is not wonderful that few chuse to expose themselves to them. And pity rather than censure should be extended to those who having once made a fair profession of truth, have unhappily shrunk under the keen and piercing blast of persecution.

When the discourse was published, he added a footnote making it clear that he had the renunciation of M'Gill in mind. It was not flattering. He declared:

The Synod of Ayr have given recent proof that the worst part of the spirit of popery, *persecution*, is not limited to the members of the Romish communion.<sup>64</sup>

Kenrick informed his friend of Belsham's sentiments and awaited his reply. In due course Wodrow obliged, once again pointing out the virtue of the compromise and suggesting that M'Gill's 'decent bow to the establishment' was not only in the interests of peace but also, in the circumstances in which there was fanaticism on one side and 'political timidity and worldly spirit on the other', it served the cause of truth and liberty reasonably well. M'Gill had not made a recantation as the Rational Dissenters had thought. He 'did not retract a single sentiment sentence or iota of his publications nor was he required to'.<sup>65</sup> Kenrick was very pleased to hear this and he passed the information on to Belsham, and yet he was not completely mollified. In his reply he reflected on the differences between the two church establishments in England and Scotland. The last heresy prosecution in England was that of Dr. Samuel Clarke early in the century. Since then heterodox clergy had published works critical of the establishment's creeds without action being taken against them. With unaccustomed restraint, he forbore from comparing the liberality of Anglicanism with the illiberality of that the Church of Scotland.<sup>66</sup> But the hint was there clearly enough for Wodrow to read, and it cannot have been pleasing to see his friend praising Anglicans when he had only recently been recording their bigotted opposition to the Dissenters just claims for increased toleration. Clearly this, for the moment, left the Kirk very low in Kenrick's



scale of enlightenment.<sup>67</sup> Wodrow felt ashamed of his country; the M'Gill affair was not completely over despite the general loss of interest in it. There were still moves to revive the prosecution. But these were, he reminded his friend, 'the impotent efforts of a few enthusiastical traders and weavers in Edinburgh Glasgow Paisley and Kilmarnock headed by two equally mad lawyers.' Impotent or no, Wodrow worked to ensure that their efforts were blocked in the Presbytery and Synod of Ayr, and, while he thus sought to protect the reasonable compromise which brought M'Gill's prosecution to a close, he reflected ironically on the reactions to what had been an effective exercise in Scottish common sense. In Scotland the compromise had been regarded 'as a proclamation of an open indemnity to Socinianism; and in England as an open and severe persecution of it.'<sup>68</sup>

Wodrow's views about the political timidity and the worldliness of the leaders of Scottish Moderatism were reinforced by his experience of trying to procure relief from the Test Act. Moderatism for Wodrow was the best and surest means of procuring progress, but it needed to be firm of purpose. Instead, Wodrow saw that Moderatism was losing its spine, leaving weakened moderate forces pressured by the Popular party on the one side and the Ministerial on the other. No doubt Moderatism would have found it difficult to retain its strength in the divisive 1790s but to Wodrow it appeared to be abandoning the fight to maintain the middle ground. He was particularly upset by the way his Moderate friends, notably Dr. Carlyle and Dr. Macknight, opted out of the campaign for relief from the Test Act. Wodrow reflected bitterly on 'the desertion of our friends and party with whom we have gone in church courts from the beginning' and on the necessity 'allly' 'openly with leaders in Church courts who I am afraid in any great cause such as Dr. Magill's...would lean too much to the fanaticism of the mob.' The appeal to public opinion so carefully eschewed by the campaign committee was thus made unavoidable by the conduct of Moderate men of influence.<sup>69</sup>

Kenrick was more cheerful about the Scottish relief campaign. He did not think the government could treat the Scots the way it had treated the English Dissenters. If it did, it would not only be flying 'in the face of the eternal principles of truth justice and wisdom' but it would 'provoke the resentment nay indignation of a high spirited and flourishing people'. Rejection would 'raise a combustion that [could not] be easily overpowered. The times were, however, propitious for success, for the Roman Catholics had been promised relief. Soon all the worldly clamour against toleration would be purified by enlightened propaganda

and Britain would become what 'God and nature intended us to be, a happy united people.'<sup>70</sup> No sooner had Kenrick written in this vein than he heard from his friend of the depressing lack of unanimity on the campaign committee. Kenrick tried to cheer him up by convincing his friend that all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds: the desertion of his friends was a more serious loss to them than to Wodrow who had remained true to the cause of virtue and religion and would be so judged by an impartial posterity; if his new allies were 'men of strong prejudices and narrow minds' then what better way of curing them of their prejudices than to unite with Wodrow's Moderates; if they were to fail like the Dissenters, then it would be only 'to rise again with more lustre'. He was confident that his conduct would be approved and compensated by Him 'who will abundantly reward all those who diligently and faithfully serve him', and certain that the more enlightenment on earth was delayed the more solidly would its foundations be laid.<sup>71</sup> Kenrick's optimism was unlikely to console him for he had argued against such ways of looking at things for years, but it may have put him in mind of Leechman's argument that the spirit of true Christianity was 'of courage and boldness, and not of fearfulness and timidity'.<sup>72</sup> At least he could feel that he had acted out his part in accord with those ideals which he and Kenrick had learned in their youth. There were far worse persecutions in prospect than those of M'Gill, far greater defeats for the cause of truth and liberty than the failure to secure relief from the Test Act. The rival strategies of the two friends for enlightenment, which reflected the different enlightened worlds which they inhabited, were increasingly impotent if not completely irrelevant in the world of the 1790s, and the only consolation available to them was that they had remained true to their beliefs and to themselves which they continued to do until their respective deaths in 1810 and 1811.

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1. Callum Brown, *The social history of religion in Scotland since 1730* (London and New York, 1987), 15-16.
2. Richard B. Sher, *Church and university in the Scottish Enlightenment. The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1985); for an earlier and most useful treatment of Moderatism, see Ian D.L. Clark, 'From protest to reaction: the Moderate regime in the Church of Scotland, 1752-1805', in N.T. Phillipson and Rosalind Mitchison eds., *Scotland in the age of improvement. Essays in Scottish history in the eighteenth century* (Edinburgh, 1970), 200-224.
3. See Nicholas Phillipson, 'Politics, politeness and the Anglicisation of early Eighteenth-Century Scottish culture', in Roger A. Mason ed., *Scotland and England, 1286-1815* (Edinburgh, 1987), 226.

4. C. Gordon Bolam, Jeremy Goring, H.L. Short, and Roger Thomas, *The English Presbyterians. From Elizabethan Puritanism to modern Unitarianism* (London, 1968), 196-197; P. Jones, 'The polite academy and the Presbyterians, 1720-1770', in J. Dwyer, R.A. Mason and Alexander Murdoch, *New perspectives on the politics and culture of early modern Scotland* (Edinburgh, n.d.), 156-178. Quite a number of English Dissenters were awarded Doctorates by Scottish Universities, and teachers at the Dissenting Academies were often recipients. When William Robertson informed Rev. Nicholas Clayton of his honour, he noted that he had 'long been acquainted with the liberal principles which gave rise to the institute of the Academy at Warrington'. Liverpool Record Office, MSS. NIC 9/15/1. A list, by no means complete, of Scottish awards to English Dissenters may be found in Nicholas Hans, *New trends in education in the eighteenth century* (London, 1951), 247.
5. On the American War of Independence and on Parliamentary Reform, Rational Dissent had more in common with the radical Whigs associated with the Popular (or 'High') Party than with the Moderates. They were at one with the latter on the issue of toleration for Catholics but their doctrine of toleration was generally more rigorous. Although the parallels are not exact, Henry May's classification of a Moderate and Revolutionary Enlightenment captures some of the differences between the Scottish and English Enlightenments in the late eighteenth century. See Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (Oxford, London, New York, 1978), and for a discussion of his thesis in relation to Rational Dissent (but not Scottish Moderatism), see Martin Fitzpatrick, 'Rational Dissent and the Enlightenment', *Faith and Freedom*, v.38 pt.2, Summer 1985, 83-101. The relationship between radicalism and intolerance is explored in Robert Kent Donovan, *No Popery and radicalism. Opposition to Roman Catholic relief in Scotland, 1778-1782* (New York and London, 1987).
6. J. Creasey, 'The Birmingham Riots. A contemporary account', *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, XIII, (1965), 112. I am indebted to Mr. Creasey, Librarian, Dr. William's Library, for permission to quote from the Wodrow-Kenrick Correspondence, and for his many kindnesses in enabling me to read this voluminous collection.
7. Dr. Williams's Library (D.W.L.), Wodrow-Kenrick Correspondence, MS. 24,157, (95), Kenrick to Wodrow, 27 April 1785.
8. See S. Kenrick to Mrs. J. Kenrick, 14 Jan. 1754, in Mrs. W. Byng Kenrick ed., *Chronicles of a Nonconformist Family. The Kenricks of Wynne Hall*, (Exeter and Birmingham, 1932), 24-27.
9. D.W.L. MS. 38 f.3, This memoir of Samuel Kenrick by his daughter is reprinted by Byng Kenrick ed., *Chronicles*, 33-38.
10. Kenrick's correspondence from Bewdley does not begin until 1768 and there are no letters between May 1771 and April 1774.
11. D.W.L. MS. 24,157 (75)i, 26 Nov. 1782; Samuel Kenrick wrote, 'I cannot think of sitting down to chat with you unless I find myself chearful & in good humour.' In a subsequent letter, he explained how his brother had been an unsuitable business partner, and how he had died in 1779 leaving a widow and four children. His widow had then died and Samuel had been left with the task of looking after the children, the eldest being thirteen. Unfortunately, Samuel had not found business easy and he had been depressed by the number of times that he had been taken in. Indeed, a good friend had advised him to give up business after his first failure, but he had persevered and was eventually successful. His daughter recorded his rueful comment, 'I thought that in order to prosper in business, if a man had honesty and industry, it would do, but alas, a knowledge of character I found was necessary in

- order to avoid the designs of the worthless part of mankind.' His failures led him to seek consolation in the Stoics rather than burden his friend with his troubles. Ibid. 9 May 1783; Byng Kenrick ed, *Chronicles*, 38.
12. See Creasey, 'The Birmingham Riots of 1791', loc.cit.' Rev. George Kenrick, to whom Samuel was great-uncle, wrote of the correspondence, 'It relates, in a great measure, to topics connected with the cause of civil and religious liberty, to which both writers were as ardently attached as they were to each other.'
13. See D.W.L. MS. 24,157(61), Kenrick to Wodrow, 2 April, 1778.
14. For example Wodrow solicited Kenrick for his views on the state of public affairs following the fall of Lord North, whom he had supported, 'at as great a length as you can write'. D.W.L. MS. 24,157 (74)i. 23 May 1782.
15. J. Wodrow ed., *Sermons by William Leechman D.D.. To which is prefixed some account of the author's life and of his lectures*, 2 vols.(London, 1789), I, 8-9,72.
16. J. Martineau, *Essays, reviews and addresses* (London, 1890) I, 400-401; see also his *Types of ethical theory*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1886) II, 481, f.n.2. The influence of Hutcheson and Leechman is discussed by Chitnis, *Scottish Enlightenment. A social history* (London, 1976), 58-59,69. See also Sher, *Church and university*, esp. 176-177; and R.L. Emerson, 'Scottish universities in the eighteenth century, 1690-1800', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, CLXVII (1977), 468-470.
17. Chitnis, *Scottish Enlightenment*, 69.
18. *Sermons by Leechman*, II, 265, 278.
19. Ibid., 217.
20. Ibid., 156.
21. Ibid., 244.
22. Ibid., 178. Even the best affections required moderation, *ibid.*, 289 and 392.
23. Ibid., 255.
24. W. Leechman, *The excellency of the spirit of Christianity* (Edinburgh, 1768), 42-43.
25. Ibid., 27, 56.
26. Ibid., 54-56, 70-71.
27. Ibid., 66; *Sermons by Leechman*, II, 357.
28. Leechman, *Excellency of Christianity*, 66.
29. D.W.L. MS. 24,157(79), Wodrow to Kenrick, 15 April 1784.
30. Ibid.
31. W. M'Gill, *A practical essay on the death of Christ in two parts* (Edinburgh, 1786), 548-549, M'Gill acknowledged that if Wodrow 'had undertaken to handle this whole subject, [he] would have rendered it unnecessary for me to attempt it.' Ibid., f.n.; see also L. Baker Short, *Pioneers of Scottish Unitarianism* (Narberth, 1963), 23-24.
32. D.W.L. MS. 24,157(84), Wodrow to Kenrick, 22 Oct. 1784.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.,
35. Ibid.(87), Wodrow to Kenrick, 3 Jan. 1785.
36. D.W.L. MS. 24,157(89), Kenrick to Wodrow, 14 Jan 1785; (110), same to same, 21 Jan. 1786; (119), same to same, 20 July 1786; (120), Wodrow to Kenrick, 15 Aug. 1786.
37. D.W.L. MS. 24,157(120), Wodrow to Kenrick, 15 Aug. 1786.
38. Ibid. (126), same to same, 9 Jan. 1787.
39. See R.B. Sher, *Church and university*, 262-328 for an excellent discussion of the decline of Moderatism.
40. D.W.L. MS. 24,157 (146), Wodrow to Kenrick, 8 March, 1789. Peebles's charges against M'Gill included the familiar charges of the High Party against the Moderates on the issue of lay patronage and subscription. Lay patronage, which had been reintroduced in 1712, became a contentious issue when the Moderate clergy began to



- side with the lay patrons against popular tendencies in the church. When unpopular ministers were appointed and their appointment resisted by the presbyteries the leaders of the emergent Moderate Party chose to see the issue as one of church discipline rather than of lay patronage which was viewed merely as the *casus belli*. On the other hand, they were anxious that church discipline should not involve the enforcement of the disciplinary aspects of the Westminster Confession (1643) to which all ministers were required to subscribe. William Dalrymple and M'Gill advocated abolishing the requirement to subscribe to the Calvinistic creed of the Confession. Leechman favoured relaxing the disciplinary aspect of the Confession without advocating abolition. The Moderate strategy of concentrating on the importance of moral sentiments was designed to divert interest away from potentially divisive doctrinal issues. Wodrow sympathized with the campaign of the English Dissenting Ministers for the abolition of their subscription to the doctrinal articles of the Thirty-Nine Articles, but he reminded his friend that the world was an imperfect world and that 'many compliances must and may be made surely without hurting the interests of truth and virtue'. D.W.L. MS.24,157 (50), 5 April, 1774; A. Carlyle, *Autobiography*, 2nd. edn.(Edinburgh and London, 1860), 244-248, 255-256. More generally, see Sher, *Church and university*, 35 and 50-55; Baker Short, op.cit., 23; Brown, *Social history of religion in Scotland*, 26-31; P. Jones, 'The polite academy and the Presbyterians, 1720-1770', and J. Dwyer, 'The heavenly city of the eighteenth-century Moderate divines', in J. Dwyer, R.A. Mason and Alexander Murdoch, *New perspectives on the politics and culture of early modern Scotland* (Edinburgh, n.d.), 163-164, 308-309.
41. *The theological repository consisting of original essays, hints, queries etc. calculated to promote religious knowledge*, I (London, 1769), xi.
  42. Jack Lindsay intro., *The autobiography of Joseph Priestley* (Bath, 1970), 113; see also Alan P.F. Sell, 'Priestley's polemic against Reid', *The Price-Priestley Newsletter*, no.3, 1979, 41-52; and M. Barfoot, 'Priestley, Reid's circle and the third organon of reasoning', in R.G.W. Anderson and Christopher Lawrence, *Science, Medicine and Dissent: Joseph Priestley (1733-1804)*, (London, 1987), 81-89
  43. M'Gill, *Death of Christ*, 336, 542-543 f.n.; Baker Short, op.cit., 24.
  44. For a discussion of the relationship between Priestley's pessimism and his providential optimism, see Martin Fitzpatrick, 'Joseph Priestley and the millenium', in Anderson and Lawrence, *Science, Medicine and Dissent*, 29-37.
  45. D.W.L. MS. 24,157 (129), Kenrick to Wodrow, 11 May 1787; appropriately, Festus told Paul that 'much learning' had made him mad. *The Acts*, 26, 24-26.
  46. R. Price, *Observations on the importance of the American Revolution* (1784), repr. B. Peach, *Richard Price and the ethical foundations of the American Revolution* (Durham, N. Carolina, 1979), 193. Condorcet attributed the doctrine of indefinite progress to Turgot, Price and Priestley. *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progres de l'esprit humain* (Paris, 1970), 166.
  47. D.W.L. MS. 24,157(147), Kenrick to Wodrow, 20 March 1789.
  48. Ibid., (148), Wodrow to Kenrick, 20 May 1789.
  49. Ibid., (150), Kenrick to Wodrow, 10 Aug. 1789.
  50. Ibid., (155), same to same, 25 Sept. 1790.
  51. Ibid., (161), Wodrow to Kenrick, 29 April, 1791. Wodrow was not alone amongst Moderates in his initial enthusiasm for the French Revolution. See Ian D. Clark, 'From protest to reaction', in Phillipson and Mitchison, *Scotland in the age of improvement*, 207; and, for a fuller discussion of Wodrow's views, John Creasey, 'Some Dissenting attitudes towards the French Revolution', *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, XIII no.4, Oct.1966, 155-167.

52. On the Test Act, see the informative discussion by G.M. Ditchfield, 'The Scottish campaign against the Test Act, 1790-1', *The Historical Journal*, XXIII (1980), 37-61.
53. D.W.L. MS., 24,157(49), Wodrow to Kenrick, 22 May 1771.
54. See Jones, 'The polite academy and the Presbyterians, 1720-1779', in Dywer, Mason and Murdoch, *New Perspectives*, 156-178.
55. W. Enfield (1741-1797) joined the staff of the Warrington Academy in 1770 as Rector Academiae and tutor in *belles lettres*. He eschewed controversy and hoped that 'errors and prejudices' would 'die away without notice'. In his preaching he deliberately avoided controversial questions, believing that its chief end should be moral instruction. W. Enfield, *Biographical sermons: or a series of discourses on the principal characters in Scripture* (London, 1777), advert.
56. *Remarks on several late publications relative to the Dissenters in a letter to Dr. Priestley. By a Dissenter* (London, 1770), 70.
57. The extent of Price's millennialism is a matter of debate; see Jack Fruchtman Jr., *The Apocalyptic politics of Richard Price and Joseph Priestley* (Philadelphia, 1986), and the review of the work by D.D. Raphael, in *Enlightenment and Dissent*, no.3, 1984,
58. It should be noted that even amongst the more assertive Rational Dissenters there were considerable differences about value of controversy. See Martin Fitzpatrick, 'Truth and toleration', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, no.1, 1982, 17-29.
59. D.W.L. MS. 24,157 (57), Wodrow to Kenrick, 26 June 1776.
60. Ibid. (151), same to same, 9 Nov. 1789.
61. Ibid. (154), same to same, 2 June 1790.
62. Ibid. (152), Kenrick to Wodrow, 16 Dec. 1789.
63. Ibid. (153), same to same, 24 Feb. 1790.
64. Ibid. (155), Kenrick to Wodrow, 25 Sept. 1790; T. Belsham, *The importance of truth, and the duty of making an open profession of it* (London, 1790), 44-45.
65. Ibid. (156), Wodrow to Kenrick, 10 Jan. 1791.
66. Ibid. (158), Kenrick to Wodrow, 1 March 1791. What neither friend mentioned, although it must have been in their minds, was the fact that William Leechman's appointment as Professor of Theology was temporarily endangered by accusations of heresy in the Presbytery of Glasgow. The Synod of Glasgow and Ayr investigated the matter and rejected the charges against him, and the General Assembly prohibited the Presbytery of Glasgow from any further proceeding against him. In Samuel Clarke's case, as in M'Gill's, there was a difference of opinion as to the nature of his recantation. See J. Wodrow ed., *Sermons by Leechman*, I, 21-27; J.P.Ferguson, *Dr. Samuel Clarke. An eighteenth-century heretic* (Kineton, Warwick, 1976), 86-91.
67. D.W.L. MS. 24,157 (159) Wodrow to Kenrick, 28 March, 1791. Wodrow here was voicing the views of the Moderates who objected to the attempt by the Popular Party to carry on the prosecution by raising money by subscription from the common people. His views were echoed by his ally, Fergusson of Craigdarroch, in the General Assembly on 28 May 1791 when the issue was finally laid to rest. According to one report of the proceedings there, 'Mr. Fergusson of Craigdorch...reprobated the idea of admitting Farmers, Shoemakers, and Taylors in different counties, to issue incendiary and calumnatory papers in order to collect money by subscription to libel ministers of the church, especially one who had already given entire satisfaction to his proper and competent judges.' *A full and particular account of the proceedings of the General Assembly, relative to the prosecution of Dr. M'Gill for heresy* (Edinburgh, 1791).
68. D.W.L. MS. 24,157 (159), Wodrow to Kenrick, 28 March, 1791.
69. Ibid. (157), same to same, 21 Feb. 1791. Amongst those who 'deserted' the cause were Dr. Alexander Carlyle, Dr. James Macknight, Dr. George Hill and Dr. John

Walker, all associated with the moderate literati of Edinburgh. See Sher, *Church and university*, 141, 301-303; and Ditchfield, art. cit., 42.

70. D.W.L. MS. 24,157(158), Kenrick to Wodrow, 1 March 1791.  
 71. Ibid. (158)ii, same to same, 2 March, 1792.  
 72. Leechman, *The excellency of the spirit of Christianity*, 5.

## JOSEPH PRIESTLEY IN CULTURAL CONTEXT: PHILOSOPHIC SPECTACLE, POPULAR BELIEF AND POPULAR POLITICS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BIRMINGHAM

John Money

### PART ONE

In the canon of eighteenth-century English thought, as laid out in Sir Leslie Stephen's classic exposition, the closeness of natural philosophy, metaphysical speculation and religious ideas is a commonplace. Notwithstanding the final caveats of Keith Thomas's *Religion and the decline of magic* against a too easy association between modernity, advancing rationalism and the disappearance of old beliefs, however, the wider cultural and political dimensions of this continuing connection are only still beginning to be explored. In this respect the first half of the century, dominated as it was by responses to the 'Newtonian Revolution', is still better served than the second.<sup>1</sup> Recent work on the history of medicine which stresses the continuing vitality at all social levels of pre- and anti-Newtonian belief and thought is now redressing both the chronological balance and that between the different elements in the story.<sup>2</sup> This essay seeks to contribute to the same process by bringing together in the particular context of Joseph Priestley's Birmingham the two sets of ideas about the human condition which were being broadcast to the English people in the age of Wilkes, Liberty and Revolution, those implicit in natural knowledge and experimentally displayed in popular philosophic spectacle, and those contained in the preaching and other activities of the religious revival. It also pursues aspects of the experience of Birmingham and the West Midlands during the later eighteenth century which were not fully addressed in my earlier study of the region.<sup>3</sup> Because that study was mainly conceived in terms of politics and political culture under the impact of advancing economic change, it left two important stones largely unturned: religious attitudes, which were considered only incidentally, and the popular impact of science, which was treated mainly within the framework of its utilitarian connections with the 'industrial revolution'. Understanding of the social and cultural relations of natural knowledge in this period is now becoming deeper and more discriminating. So, too, is appreciation of the authentic and autonomous nature of eighteenth-century provincial culture, as distinct both from that of its metropolitan counterpart, and from dominating and distorting stereotypes projected backwards from the Victorian age. This, therefore, seems an appropriate time to return to those unturned stones: the more so in view of the general censure recently passed upon eighteenth-century historiography as a whole by

Clarkeian revisionism for its neglect of theological and ecclesiastical issues—though it remains very moot how fully the results of this particular exercise in the genre will corroborate the Clarkeian case.<sup>4</sup>

The accepted explanation of the Sacheverellite behaviour of the common people of Birmingham in July 1791 is that it was essentially a case of misdirected class antagonism. 'An unruly populace with strong Church and King, and, in the early years, even Jacobite proclivities' had, it is argued, been part of the local 'pattern of politics' throughout the century.<sup>5</sup> By 1795, Birmingham's working class had outgrown such 'preindustrial' attitudes, and could recognize the real enemy.<sup>6</sup> Four years earlier, however, in the aftermath of the Dissenting campaign against the Test and Corporation Acts, when loyalist reaction to the French Revolution was still in its early stages, it was still only on the verge of such consciousness. When Priestley precipitated the breakdown of relations between the two halves of Birmingham's elite which gave the mob its opportunity, the local parson magistrates were thus able to divert its energies to the traditional target. There is a good deal of truth in this, but it falls short of complete satisfaction in two respects. By hypostatizing Birmingham's 'unruly populace' as endemic in the town's 'pattern of politics'—as a phenomenon which, almost by definition, needs no further explanation—and by treating the riots as typical of that pattern, it ignores the fact that for the previous thirty years, the town had enjoyed a justified reputation for its enviable combination of freedom and good order. Thereby it obviates the need to ask why there was a mob at all in 1791, and why it could still be induced to behave as it did. Besides this, its discussion of the circumstances of the riots goes no further than the most immediate political and denominational alignments involved, and treats even these as merely precipitating causes. Thus Priestley himself continues to be cast as little more than the hapless victim of larger social forces, who became so because he allowed his exasperating and regrettable weakness for theological and political controversy to distract him from his proper business as a scientist.<sup>7</sup> From here, it is only a short step to the conclusion, first and most ironically stated by Edward Gibbon, that the whole episode was an object lesson in the reasons why science should stay out of the public eye.<sup>8</sup> If only Priestley had stayed in his laboratory, he would have been a better scientist, Birmingham's elite would not have been divided, and the town would have remained at peace because its magistrates would not have been tempted to unleash the social forces which brought them to grief. Though there is an obvious sense in which Priestley did bring his troubles on his own head, this does less than justice to his own part in the affair.

Besides immediate circumstances and tensions, a full account of the genesis and impact of the riots must therefore range more widely, to take in the popularization of natural knowledge in general, and the factors which conditioned attitudes to it, during the second half of the century, quite apart from Priestley, as well as the Doctor's own conception of the enterprise and the particular responses which he provoked. The argument which follows approaches this task through three recent contentions: first that public philosophic spectacle was an essential, not a peripheral part of the eighteenth-century pursuit of natural knowledge; second, that in the provinces of Georgian England, that pursuit arose from aspirations to polite culture and enlightenment, not from the utilitarian or compensatory motives of the following century; and third, that it is critically important to consider the connections between such aspirations on the part of local elites and the more mundane concerns of those at lower social levels. Following an initial review of the first of these three, and of its significance for studies of Priestley, the development of these propositions falls into two main parts. The first considers Birmingham's ambivalent exposure to public philosophic performance, quite apart from Priestley, and also its equally ambivalent experience of popular religious belief and practice in the fifty years before the riots. It begins, however, by reviewing the town's general characteristics at this time in order to replace the 'Northern' and 'Industrial' connotations usually associated with Birmingham, which reflect a later phase in its history, by a 'South-western' affiliation with the towns and cities of the Severn Valley, which reflects more accurately the setting for the areas's philosophic and religious experience prior to Priestley's arrival.

Beneath the contextual detail sketched in the footnotes, this experience was essentially a tale of two cities, Birmingham and Bristol, with which Birmingham's links, religious and cultural as well as commercial, were particularly close. Examination not only shows that for much of the period between the 1730s and the 1780s, experimental philosophy continued to exist in close association with the spiritual and pietistic ideas of the religious revival; it also suggests that this association was sustained by the continuing currency of a general view of the nature and purpose of language which still reflected the realist doctrines and ideals of the Renaissance, a view which Priestley himself to some extent shared with significant consequences. These characteristics, which were especially evident and influential in Bristol, suggest a broad parallel between the trajectory of the eighteenth-century tradition of philosophic spectacle and that of the religious revival. Exploration of this relationship also suggests that both were undergoing



comparable transitions between the 1760s and the 1780s. In this process, the crucial issues for orthodoxy were already clear: the vital importance of the difference between matter and spirit, and the equal importance of coming to a right view of the relationship between language and reality, as well as between history, progress and revelation. The level and extent of religious controversy in Birmingham during the sixties and the seventies, and the area's crucial, but chequered and acrimonious place in the history of Methodism, suggest that these issues had not only been identified, but were being vigorously debated at all social levels, well before the intervention of Joseph Priestley. This itself is considered in the second half of this account, together with its puzzling and paradoxical aftermath. Before the enquiry as whole reaches that stage, however, it will hope to have shown that when Priestley reformulated the whole debate by the publication of his *Disquisitions relating to matter and spirit* in 1777, his proposal to purify religion by the millennial fusion of progressive experimental philosophy and Christian revelation intervened in an already volatile and explosive process at a critical moment. It is this which accounts for the depth of the animosity which underlay the secular economic tensions as well as the more obvious denominational and political divisions which erupted in 1791. The events of that summer and the groups which they involved thus remain at the epicentre of this enquiry, even though it neither intends nor attempts to reconstruct the course of the riots themselves, still less to advance a new theory of particular blame.

In a recent discussion of 'natural philosophy and public spectacle in the eighteenth century',<sup>9</sup> Simon Schaffer develops three themes: that public performance was an essential part of the purpose of eighteenth-century natural philosophy; that the style and purpose of performance changed as the operations of nature came to be visualized, not as the direct manifestation of divine activity, but as mutually regulating components in a providential system, and that in the 1790s the shadow of Jacobinism wrought a corresponding change 'between an entrepreneurial deployment of natural philosophy and a political control' of it. At the risk of foreshortening Schaffer's highly detailed argument, which comprehends France, Italy and Germany as well as Britain, his account runs roughly as follows.

The principal objective of natural philosophical experiment in the middle decades of the century was the production of active powers by the manipulation of passive and inert matter. To do this was to demonstrate God's action in nature, and the experimentalist's task was

to draw out the moral and theological implications of active powers for his audience. The eighteenth-century public's love of the marvellous, whose commercial possibilities made such philosophical display a natural vehicle for entrepreneurial exploitation, could thus be incorporated into prevailing systems of social control. Experimental philosophy was a risky business, however, and not only in the literal sense. Those who played with fire played also with its social and moral counterpart, for the production of active powers posed a philosophical and theological dilemma. Exploited without discretion, they begat their psycho-social analogue, enthusiasm, which was indeed often explained as an electric phenomenon. At the same time, they might as easily lead their audience away from God, towards a pantheist or hylozoist concept of nature which had dangerously egalitarian connotations, as towards Him.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, not to demonstrate them at all was to leave the door open to atheism and indifference. The pressing need to distinguish between serious practitioners and quacks to which this dilemma gave rise caused the former to police their enterprise. At the same time, the earthquakes of the early 1750s and growing interest in atmospheric phenomena combined to redirect audience attention away from single instances and towards the manifestation of the whole range of active powers in the theatre of nature itself, in which the particular experiments of the philosopher were writ large.

This redirection had important implications, both for experimental natural philosophy, and for its audience. If God was to be reliably detected, not in single acts or interventions, but in the interaction of a plurality of powers, the moral task of natural philosophy was to be achieved, not by the dramatic production of wonders which would directly affect the indiscriminating sensibility of the public, but by the routine demonstration of a long series of phenomena which would bring the thoughtful observer to a rational understanding of the whole economy of nature, behind which the Almighty Hand lay hidden. The investigation of nature thus became serious, not only for the practitioner, but also for his audience. No longer a fit subject for the vendor of public spectacle, it was beginning to be the pursuit of the full-time researcher, sharing his findings with a particular community of equally dedicated fellow students. If philosophical display still had any public purpose, it was now explicitly political: to educate in an appropriately generalized 'way of seeing'. 'Science' thus parted company from the original ways and purposes of eighteenth-century 'Natural Philosophy'. As it did so, active powers became the stock-in-trade of the conjuror and the adepts of the original enterprise were faced with a choice between radicalism and charlatanry.

Schaffer's main protagonist is without doubt Joseph Priestley. This is so not just because the notorious culmination of Priestley's career happened to coincide with the critical stage in the transition from eighteenth-century 'Natural Philosophy' to nineteenth-century 'Science'. The real reason is that Priestley's life, whether as teacher, experimental philosopher, metaphysician, theologian, Dissenting minister or millenarian political idealist in the civic humanist tradition, contained within itself the tensions and contradictions of that transformation.<sup>11</sup> It is therefore probably wrong to approach Priestley by looking for a single synoptic 'key' to him in one or other of his various personae. Nevertheless, if one of these has to be singled out, it is his activity as an experimental natural philosopher within the public tradition of the eighteenth century: for it was here that his other concerns came together, not only most actively, but also most irreconcilably.

From his earliest days at Daventry Academy in Northamptonshire, Priestley was convinced that 'religious knowledge will never be communicated, with certainty and good effect, from the pulpit only.'<sup>12</sup> Yet it was this dedicated experimentalist, the owner by 1791 of a collection of instruments designed to exhibit and not merely represent the powers of God which dwarfed any other on either side of the channel, who 'destroyed the very basis on which lecturing and performing depended' because it was he above all who taught, not 'the supremacy of the spectacular instance of power in matter', but a range of interactive powers whose continuous presence in the economy of nature was to be rationally apprehended by routine demonstration.<sup>13</sup> That is the paradox which explains the central position of Priestley in the public story of eighteenth-century natural philosophy.

This impasse provides a logical key to Priestley's place in the demise of eighteenth-century philosophic spectacle. Though it may be vindicated by the subsequent unfolding of the story, however, it too may mislead, because it represents formal consequences better than circumstances. Since it does not directly address the context in which the paradox of Priestley's career was worked out, it may, whatever its intentions to the contrary, seem to offer simply another proof of what the events of 1791 are usually taken to demonstrate: that 'Dr. Phlogiston' was, after all, never more than a wrong-headed, self-taught provincial experimenter, imprisoned like so many of the type by the theoretical deficiencies of his limited background, an oddity in the Newtonian tradition, who remained obstinately stuck up a scientific blind alley, made no real impact and, with the exception of a few equally deluded cranks, neither

had, nor was ever likely to have, any real following despite his rather futile radicalism.<sup>14</sup> To think this is to make a mistake not made by Joseph Carles, J.P. of Handsworth, Staffordshire, his colleague on the bench, Dr. Spencer, the Rector of St Philip's, Birmingham, or John Brooke, Attorney and Coroner for Warwickshire. Before Priestley is further considered, therefore, something must be said of the context within which these and other local 'Dons of Church and King' in 1791 were forced to take notice of him.<sup>15</sup> The general story of the riots has often been told, but three aspects of it are important here: the nature of Birmingham's social and political experience prior to 1791; the town's exposure to natural philosophic spectacle apart from Priestley, and its experience of the religious revival.

If Priestley stood personally at the crux of the late eighteenth-century transition in the history of natural philosophy, Birmingham occupied a similar position in the larger transformation of English provincial culture and opinion during the late Enlightenment. As Roy Porter remarks in a recent survey of this process, the West Midlands, 'the home par excellence of industrialization through small masters and workshops' where the high enlightenment of the Lunar Society coexisted with, and depended on, a world of skilled artisans whose livelihoods depended on commercialized consumerism, is 'the crucial test case'.<sup>16</sup> Birmingham's experience during the second half of the eighteenth century was marked by two characteristics.<sup>17</sup> On the one hand, its industrial structure was very diverse, and its leaders had shown themselves very adept at exploiting a flexible and pragmatic accommodation with the values, conventions and political relationships of established society. These factors helped to mitigate class tension and absorb it within a collective sense of achievement and worth. On the other hand, there had been a strong proto-radical presence in Birmingham long before Priestley arrived in 1780. Deeply rooted in the Dissenting congregations, this aspect of the town was especially strong amongst its printers, most notably those who had learned their trade in the workshops of John Baskerville, flamboyant deist, English publisher of Voltaire and friend of Franklin and Jefferson. Besides these giants of the age, Baskerville's circle included not only William Small, the progenitor of the Lunar Society, but also provincial printers like the Wilkite Robert Martin, Christopher Earl, who also kept the Engine Tavern in Dale End, and Orion Adams, one of a family of pioneer newspapermen already famous in Manchester and Chester. Here, surely, was one important connection of the kind sought by Porter between the elite environment of the Lunar Society and the 'lower level



Schaffer's main protagonist is without doubt Joseph Priestley. This is so not just because the notorious culmination of Priestley's career happened to coincide with the critical stage in the transition from eighteenth-century 'Natural Philosophy' to nineteenth-century 'Science'. The real reason is that Priestley's life, whether as teacher, experimental philosopher, metaphysician, theologian, Dissenting minister or millenarian political idealist in the civic humanist tradition, contained within itself the tensions and contradictions of that transformation.<sup>11</sup> It is therefore probably wrong to approach Priestley by looking for a single synoptic 'key' to him in one or other of his various personae. Nevertheless, if one of these has to be singled out, it is his activity as an experimental natural philosopher within the public tradition of the eighteenth century: for it was here that his other concerns came together, not only most actively, but also most irreconcilably.

From his earliest days at Daventry Academy in Northamptonshire, Priestley was convinced that 'religious knowledge will never be communicated, with certainty and good effect, from the pulpit only.'<sup>12</sup> Yet it was this dedicated experimentalist, the owner by 1791 of a collection of instruments designed to exhibit and not merely represent the powers of God which dwarfed any other on either side of the channel, who 'destroyed the very basis on which lecturing and performing depended' because it was he above all who taught, not 'the supremacy of the spectacular instance of power in matter', but a range of interactive powers whose continuous presence in the economy of nature was to be rationally apprehended by routine demonstration.<sup>13</sup> That is the paradox which explains the central position of Priestley in the public story of eighteenth-century natural philosophy.

This impasse provides a logical key to Priestley's place in the demise of eighteenth-century philosophic spectacle. Though it may be vindicated by the subsequent unfolding of the story, however, it too may mislead, because it represents formal consequences better than circumstances. Since it does not directly address the context in which the paradox of Priestley's career was worked out, it may, whatever its intentions to the contrary, seem to offer simply another proof of what the events of 1791 are usually taken to demonstrate: that 'Dr. Phlogiston' was, after all, never more than a wrong-headed, self-taught provincial experimenter, imprisoned like so many of the type by the theoretical deficiencies of his limited background, an oddity in the Newtonian tradition, who remained obstinately stuck up a scientific blind alley, made no real impact and, with the exception of a few equally deluded cranks, neither

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of enlightenment culture', prudential and self-interested, with which the Lunar world coexisted.

The output of the Baskerville press and the other printers associated with it certainly supports the suggestion: for it included not only Vergil, the Bible, the works of Shakespeare, a projected edition of Voltaire and other major productions of the master printer himself, but also an edition of the popular verse of John Freeth, well known in the Midlands as an election poet and writer of topical doggerel. Besides this, Robert Martin, who was Baskerville's manager, used the press to produce an unauthorized life of Wilkes in 1769 which was widely distributed in serial form throughout the surrounding region.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, Myles Swinney, another associate who later acquired a considerable part of Baskerville's stock-in-trade and did a good deal of work for members of the Lunar Society, especially Priestley, William Withering and Erasmus Darwin, was serializing Voltaire's views on religion in the *Warwickshire Journal*, one of the three prototypes of what became the *Birmingham and Stafford Chronicle*. Swinney was so successful in providing an independent and critical alternative to the cautious, establishment-minded *Birmingham Gazette* that in 1793 the government was advised to buy the *Birmingham and Stafford Chronicle* to keep it out of Painite hands.<sup>19</sup> The chief keeper of the radical tradition was, however, the Birmingham Book Club, a tradesman's reading society believed to have been started in the 1740s in response to the advent of cheap serial publication, and certainly in existence by 1758.<sup>20</sup> It was the Book Club's largely Dissenting membership which formed the core of the Birmingham Library, the first of Priestley's local battlegrounds. In close connection with other groups, such as the Free Debating Society at the Red Lion and the strongly Masonic personal circle of the 'poet' Freeth, the Wilkite, pro-American proprietor of the Leicester Arms coffee house, the Birmingham Book Club played a central part in every phase of local radicalism between the American Revolution and the Great Reform Act.

For much of the time, these two elements were able to coexist and even to complement each other. It was the Wilkite voting power of North-western Warwickshire which in the 1774 general election gave the leaders of the Birmingham Interest their basic leverage in County politics, and thus the chief source of their considerable lobbying power at Westminster. From the mid-eighties onwards, however, the common ground was being eliminated, not only by the controversies associated with Priestley, but also by a sordid local squabble over local rates, police and the management of the Poor, which also set Church and Meeting

against each other. When the impact of national and international events coincided in 1790-1791 with serious unemployment brought on by a fashion trend, the abandonment of polished buttons and shoe buckles, which was widely associated with the French example, the collapse was much more than just a breakdown in relations between two halves of Birmingham's elite. It was a reaction at all levels of the community by those who had too much at stake in existing arrangements to allow them to be disturbed.

Besides these general tensions, however, there were two more particular reasons why Birmingham's reaction to Priestley, positive as well as negative, was likely to be particularly strong. The first was the town's intense exposure, quite apart from Priestley, to the ambivalence of philosophic performance. The second was its crucial place in the history of religious revival.

In the epic account, marmorealized in the statues of Watt and Priestley which used to guard the Victorian Gothic entrance to the old Birmingham and Midland Institute and now watch over the public space outside the new Central Library, it was Birmingham science which in combination with Mancunian enterprise made the Industrial Revolution. Though it still prevails today, this image of Birmingham as the southern outrider of industrial Britain, one of the great Victorian Cities whose wealth and power epitomized the nineteenth-century 'Rise of the Provinces', does not fit the eighteenth-century situation. 'The Great Toy-Shop of Europe' was already more than just a large provincial town with a growing manufacturing sector and a spreading hinterland.<sup>21</sup> Its commercial connections were already continental and global, and though Brummagen goods and their Brummie makers already had a certain reputation, Birmingham strove with appreciable success to counteract it by projecting an image of fashion and elegance. It had its theatres, which Matthew Boulton defended against the new evangelical 'respectability' because they brought rich tourists in to spend their money and leave behind their refining example. It had its subscription concerts, its pleasure gardens, its Crescent, even its own spa. Its oratorio festivals were the premier musical events of the Midlands, and high points in the region's social calendar. In 1785 Birmingham ranked with Worcester, Salisbury and Liverpool as one of the largest provincial centres of retail trade outside London. As a provincial shopping centre, only the combination of Bath and Bristol, with which Birmingham had close business and cultural connections in any case, surpassed these four.<sup>22</sup> This puts Birmingham in company rather different from its usual associates.

The present significance of this is that as a major harbinger of the consumer, as well as of the more familiar industrial revolution, Birmingham was fertile ground for the entrepreneurial deployment of philosophic spectacle.<sup>23</sup> Besides its own practitioners, like Joseph Hornblower at the London Apprentice who in 1757 claimed to raise water, play tunes on bells and shut doors, all by 'the surprising force of electricity', the town also attracted a steady stream of visitors, such as Thomas Yeomans of Northampton, who in 1746 and 1747 advertised his exhibition of electrical phenomena by listing the spectacular cures he had achieved.<sup>24</sup> To list and plot all the movements of these itinerants would be a major task. However, comparison of the Birmingham and Bristol papers suggests that in this respect, as in many others, the correspondence between the two places and their surrounding regions was close. Thus William Griffiths (or Griffiss) who lectured on 'the physics of life' in Bristol in September 1755 had been in Birmingham in the previous April; James Ferguson, who visited Birmingham in 1761 and 1771, was lecturing in Bristol in the interval; John Arden, originally of Beverley in Yorkshire, but latterly of Bath, was a regular visitor in the sixties and seventies.<sup>25</sup> By the mid-seventies, when John Warltire, perhaps the best known and widely travelled philosophical performer of all, made his Birmingham and Bristol debuts, the two places had become major stopping points on a regular country-wide circuit, and this may have diminished the particular significance of the connection.<sup>26</sup> In earlier years, however, and in the case of lesser known performers, it was of more distinctive significance, because outside London, it was Bath and Bristol which constituted not only the earliest, but also the largest and the most sophisticated and heterodox market for philosophical spectacle.

Heterodoxy, or at least eclecticism, is certainly the impression left by Birmingham's performers. Besides the direct encouragement given by the town's leaders to such serious demonstrators as John Warltire, Adam Walker or Henry Moyes, who came with imposing credentials and Lunar Society blessing, philosophical displays were the staple fare in Birmingham's theatres and concert halls. Even the most trivial acts, like Mr. Perry's performance on the musical glasses, which elicited rhapsodies on the celestial harmony, were apt to have their moral potential drawn out, and most of this activity can be situated within the orthodox mainstream, pitched at various levels for various audiences.<sup>27</sup> In the case of the most popular offerings, such as George Alexander Stephens's 'GRAND CALCULATIONS, Mathematical Operations and Magical Card Deceptions', it carried very little metaphysical or

philosophical message, though Stephens did include some telepathic effects along with his other main attraction, 'the famous Mr. Brest's flourishing trick with a Roasted Leg of Mutton'.<sup>28</sup> The overall effect was no doubt to convey a sense both of 'the great progress that has lately been made in the various branches of the philosophical sciences', and of Birmingham's modernity—especially when the show, like Adam Walker's Eidouranion in 1781, displayed the achievements of the town's own skilled trades.<sup>29</sup>

By itself, the evidence of such promotions may simply go to show that then, as now, 'special effects' were a sure-fire sell in the entertainments business. In keeping with this, it is no surprise to find that modern-minded Birmingham people went mad over Messrs. Sadler, Dickens and Cracknell, the three balloon aviators who literally descended on them in the early months of 1785.<sup>30</sup> Other aspects of the town's experience of philosophic spectacle, natural as well as artificial, suggest, however, that more was entailed than the craze for novelty. On 21st June 1773 the *Birmingham Gazette* had devoted most of its new magazine to a warning of divine displeasure entailed in an 'earthquake' at Buildwas on the River Severn the previous month.<sup>31</sup> Ten years later, on an August Sunday in 1783, a still more tremendous portent occurred when a ball of light 'of unparalleled radiance and brilliance' was observed by several witnesses. It 'passed over this town in a horizontal direction of North to South, having a diameter of about twelve inches or more, and reflected a Light exceeding the Full Moon in her great splendour. Its motion was nearly equal to the swiftness of the flying of a bird and it left behind a trail of luminous Globes which gradually disappeared'. The published explanation for such an 'extraordinary Meteor', in terms of aerial chemistry and a Priestleyan economy of interacting powers,<sup>32</sup> cannot fail to have influenced response to the more spectacular displays of such experimental philosophers as Mr. Pitt, who in 1784 was demonstrating several of Priestley's own chemical experiments with an extensive apparatus which included an air gun with a range of a hundred and fifty yards. If this was apt to set the more curious thinking about the forces entailed in such phenomena, they were equally likely to be intrigued by Mr. Burton's promise to include an experimental proof of Newton's law of gravitation in his lectures on central forces two years later.<sup>33</sup> Even more likely to start questions were demonstrations of magnetic effects and the displays of 'philosophical fireworks', given, with suitable music, by Signors Conetti, Pinetti and Breslau in the New Street Theatre or Mr. Cresshull's Assembly Rooms, or the cures effected by Mr. Yeldall's concentrated magnetic effluvia at his Magnetizing Rooms at No.30, Cherry Street.<sup>34</sup>



The predominant image of Birmingham as the most Victorian of Victorian Cities is misleading in other respects too. People who liked to spend their free time at the circus or the cruel sports for which the Midlands were notorious in the previous century; whose idea of 'improvement' meant the boozy surroundings of a tavern debating club, or a magnetical raree-show in a playhouse, were not the most obvious converts to sobriety, respectability and rational recreation.<sup>35</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that the history of popular religion in Birmingham was as ambivalent as that of popular science.

Though their objectives fundamentally differed and their paths eventually diverged, there was much in common between the early trajectory of the religious revival in England and that of the eighteenth-century tradition of natural philosophical performance. Despite the conventional identification of each with a dominant orthodoxy, Wesleyan in the former case, Newtonian in the latter, both were really much more diverse in their origins. In the early years, their respective purposes—the revival of a religion based on direct personal experience of Grace and the moralization of active powers in nature as direct evidence of the divine presence—appealed to essentially the same type of direct response.<sup>36</sup> Though they did not coincide, both found adherents among same groups and drew upon a similar body of ideas, in which strains of mystical continental pietism, Biblical fundamentalism and millennial expectation were mixed with varying compatibility.<sup>37</sup> The two main components of this amalgam, united in their criticism of mechanist Newtonianism, though in other respects less easily reconciled, were the ideas of Jacob Boehme, available through his English translator and interpreter, William Law, and the linguistic physico-theology of John Hutchinson.<sup>38</sup> Neither rejected Newtonianism outright but both disputed its dominance by attempting to ground it in a prior source of revealed truth. Thus, for Law and his disciples, who subsumed Newton under the mystical vision of Boehme, electrical phenomena proved the animating presence of Fire in all things and therefore the direct immanence of God in the universe. The linguistic physico-theology of John Hutchinson, on the other hand, regarded Newton's *Principia* as mere mathematical abstraction; sought the true natural philosophy in those of Moses, accessible through a purified understanding of Biblical Hebrew, the primal language given to man in the Beginning but lost since Babel; and reconciled matter to spirit by explaining the operations of nature as the contact-action of Light, Fire and Air, a physical analogue of the Trinity through which a transcendent God acted in the material universe.<sup>39</sup>

Unfamiliar though these ideas may sound to ears conditioned by the enlightened refrain of empirical reason, their implications and purchase are important. In their relegation of abstraction and analysis to a role secondary to mystical vision and analogy, they demonstrate the continuing currency of a view of Reason as Cosmic Order and of Language as the direct signature of Reality. Such a baroque framework for thought, most obvious in the Hutchinsonian proposal to ground natural philosophy in God's own Naming of His Works, which must express most perfectly and immutably the analogy between matter and spirit, is a far cry from the Enlightenment view of language as an independently variable representational system which should serve empirical enquiry in its progress from phenomenon to principle. Its significance here lies in two considerations. The first is the extent of the survival of such a view and its importance within the intellectual history of the religious revival. The second is that though Joseph Priestley fully shared the enlightenment's abhorrence of metaphysics, his 'analytic and historic' method entailed a scientific terminology objectively rooted in 'Facts', which grounded thought in Nature, and which thus also still contained important elements of the old view of language. It was this characteristic of Priestley's thought and practice which enabled him to link the systematic lesson of his experimental philosophy with his purposes as a theologian. It therefore bore centrally on the way in which he and his disciples expected the dilemma in his method identified by Schaffer to resolve itself. At the same time, however, that anticipation also placed him at particular odds with the tension which already existed within the religious revival, as it too encountered the shoals of linguistic transition. Thus, it was also central to the circumstances and meaning of 1791 and its aftermath.<sup>40</sup>

The Hutchinsonian system seems aeons removed from a world made safe for Whigs by proscription of the Tories and a comfortable compound of rational religion and Newtonian philosophy. Yet through its lasting institutional links with the High Church reaction to Newtonian Latitude, especially at Oxford, it attracted a considerable following among churchmen, many of whom were in a position to affect the next generation through their educational influence in the endowed grammar schools. It must, for example, have come as something of a surprise to Lord Chief Justice Hardwicke, a very bastion of latitudinarian stability, to find himself listening during his circuit visit to England's second city in August 1735 to *The superior and inferiour Elahim*, an assize sermon by the Rev. Alexander Catcott, headmaster of Bristol Grammar School from 1722 to 1743, which traced the authority of the secular magistrate to the Hutchinsonian demiurges who had assisted at



the creation of the world and still watched over it. Yet Catcott's sermon, which came on the eve of a sustained Church and Tory revival in Bristol politics, was officially published in London and Bristol. It provoked at least nine other works by local authors in the following six years, and it was reprinted as late as 1781 by the University of Oxford.<sup>41</sup> Besides this, the Hutchinsonian insistence on a transcendent God, which restored the Augustinian relationship of absolute dependence between Man and his Creator, made it highly compatible with the the theology of the revival. On the sublunary plane, however, its concept of a world sustained by direct physical forces, different in manifestation but one in essence, was difficult to distinguish from more materialist ideas.<sup>42</sup>

The result was that long before Priestley's entry into the discourse, the need to establish a right distinction between matter and spirit, and thus between the implications of experimental philosophy and religious truth, had become vitally important to the direction which the religious revival would take. This was particularly apparent in the Behmenist and Hutchinsonian controversy which characterized mid-century relations between religion and natural philosophy in Bristol, and more generally in John Wesley's continuing difficulties with the ambiguities of both the Behmenist and Hutchinsonian positions. Wesley himself was no natural philosopher and never confused the purposes of such pursuits with his own, despite his popularizing works in the subject and his frequent appeal to natural phenomena to reinforce his own message.<sup>43</sup> Yet even his position remained unclear until his repudiation of William Law's later mystical teaching in 1756.<sup>44</sup> In the case of others closely associated with him, the confluence between experimental philosophy and revival lasted considerably longer. 'You cannot after such discoveries as these treat Christians with contempt', wrote the electrician Richard Symes, the Behmenist rector of St. Werburgh's, Bristol, seven years after he had been invited to join John Wesley's projected evangelical preaching union of 1764: this in the introduction to his *Fire Analysed* of 1771, which gave an evangelical description of electro-medicine and subsumed Boyle and Newton under Boehme and Law.<sup>45</sup>

Two features of this tangled relationship are especially important. The first is that just as the orthodox community of experimental philosophers responded to the need to police their enterprise by changing their emphasis from the dramatic, but easily faked, impact of the single instance of active power to the providential economy of the natural system as a whole, so the controversies which raged within the revival during the third quarter of the century, as its language and social message moved away from older sixteenth and seventeenth-century

forms, represent a similar response to the taints of enthusiasm apparent in the debate between the revival's Calvinist and Arminian components, which pitted two drastically different metaphysical visions against each other: one in which the necessary perfection and universality of God, the logical impossibility of any real being separate from that perfection, and the salvation of the Chosen were independent of consciousness or will, and faith an objective knowledge of these ontological facts; and one in which knowledge and belief alike were conditionally derived from the empirical self-consciousness and freely willed choices of each created individual.<sup>46</sup>

It is here that developments in experimental philosophy and revival religion seem most comparable, for there is a marked similarity—at least on the 'orthodox' side—between changes in the systematics of experimental philosophy at this time and the constant Wesleyan reiteration of an Arminian doctrine of Christian Perfection which held that, however marvellous it might seem, Grace was neither given once and for all in a single miraculous manifestation, nor a fore-ordained inheritance for the Elect, but a state accessible to all who freely sought it which, once found, had to be consciously retained by mental labour and spiritual discipline within the wider economy of God's purposes. Theological debate is no place for the mere historian, but its more mundane implications are fairer game, and one of these was a more provisional set of expectations about the worldly manifestation of those purposes and a more contingent or relative view of the connections between language and reality. The effect which this might have can be seen in the gradual acceptance of *laissez faire* ideas which characterized John Wesley's own social and economic commentary during the 1770s and early 1780s.<sup>47</sup> Certainly his express instructions in April 1782 for the removal from Methodist tracts bound for Leeds, Sheffield and Newcastle of any reference to 'Amos VIII, 2', a ferocious apocalyptic commination against forestallers and regraters, as 'not of so general use', suggests a tardy conversion to a belief in the Hidden Hand and a certain empiricist caution about applying the language of the Hebrew God to the moral economy of eighteenth-century England.<sup>48</sup>

The second feature is that in his efforts to bring the originally inchoate elements of the revival under the control of his own connection, to steer them safely between the scylla of seventeenth-century antinomianism and the charybdis of Behmenite mysticism, and to place the practical development of evangelical thought on sound and reasonable foundations, Wesley encountered his most serious and continuous difficulties in the West Midlands. This may surprise, since this is generally counted as

one of the areas where, after initial set-backs, Methodism scored some of its earliest and most notable triumphs. Yet from the earliest years of the revival, when Wesley's followers in Birmingham and Bristol encountered the Behmenist disciples of Hannah Wharton, one of the most influential of the later English adherents of the French Prophets, to the late eighties and early nineties, the West Midlands remained disputed territory.<sup>49</sup> By then, not only Wesley's sermons, but also the works of Jacob Boehme and Emmanuel Swedenborg could be borrowed from at least two of Birmingham's seven libraries, and besides providing Priestley with the most liberal congregation in the country, the town was also supporting one of England's earliest Swedenborgian churches, as well as sheltering followers of the universalist Elhanan Winchester.<sup>50</sup> As for the view from the street, the hudibrastic lines of John Freeth, the host of the Birmingham Book Club, written in the days of Wilkes when Birmingham's would-be Hutchinsonians could brush up their Hebrew and Chaldee in the Rev. Machin's school for ten shillings a quarter, and Voltaire's religious opinions were bandied about in the local press, say it all:

'Anonimous may still proceed  
In vindicating Voltaire's creed;  
One week we ponder at his lecture,  
The next are pausing at th' Objector;  
And so the farce is carried on  
And Gospel tenets, pro and con,  
Are in a Country Journal stated,  
And by the Lord Knows who debated,  
Held out to publick exhibition  
By Quibble, Quirk and Supposition;  
And weavers, smiths and button-turners  
Set up for Spiritual Discerners.  
'Tis thus the common modes that flow  
Are cuff'd and cudgell'd to and fro,  
And poor Religion, by each Snack  
Is pelted like a Common Hack,  
Bandied about by Sandemonian,  
Moravian, Monk or Muckletonian.'<sup>51</sup>

To read Wesley's record of his visits to the area is thus to be returned frequently to the world of the Civil War Sects.<sup>52</sup> In 1755, when the tide seemed to have turned elsewhere in the region, Birmingham itself remained 'a barren, dry uncomfortable place' where the seed of the revival was rooted up by 'fierce, unclean, brutish, blasphemous Antinomians, and the mystic foxes have taken pains to spoil what remained with their new gospel.' Only in the later 1760s did the

situation begin to improve. By then the attitude of the local authorities had begun to change. The threat of disruption had receded, congregations were larger, and the Methodists now enjoyed the support of at least some of the town's clergy. Respectability, however, did not bring peace. Wesley's journal entries during his visits to Birmingham and the Black Country still recorded periodic backslidings while his insistent preaching on the necessity of 'going on to perfection' continued to reflect the struggle against 'those who, by denying this, sap the very foundation both of inward and of outward holiness.' In the 1780s, when the Birmingham society, with eight hundred members was surpassed only by those in London and Bristol, and three new meetings were opened in six years, all within a mile of each other, Wesley was probably reaching a total audience of about four thousand in and out of doors on his visits to the town. Yet even then, Birmingham Methodism continued to be troubled and its internal affairs embittered by antinomian strife.<sup>53</sup>

In Birmingham religion, as in Birmingham science, orthodox and heterodox were thus already evenly mixed. At least until particular groups were rich enough to acquire their own quarters and the urban environment itself began to be transformed by the building of the chapels and meeting rooms so characteristic of the following century, these activities, apparently so different, even occupied the same physical space. Until the opening of the first of their own chapels in 1782, for example, the Methodists had used a succession of outbuildings and a disused theatre. When Edward Burn, the curate and later rector of St. Mary's, who was to become one of Priestley's chief local adversaries, first came to Birmingham from Trevecca, the Countess of Huntingdon's evangelical seminary, he began his preaching ministry in the Long Room of the Red Lion in the Bull Ring, better known locally as the home of the radically inclined Free Debating Society.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, that society, where women as well as men argued about the moral influence of the theatre (which they supported) and street ballads (which they did not), with as much enthusiasm as they debated the licensing of pawnbrokers, the game laws, or the relative influence of curiosity and ambition on the human mind; but which also resolved that 'want of religion is the cause of the increase of criminal offences, and prayer to God for the renewal of the heart is the most likely means to prevent them', is apt commentary on the eclecticism of 'low enlightenment culture' among Birmingham's small masters.<sup>55</sup>

Burn arrived at about the same time as Priestley, but even before this, the controversies associated with the revival had been aired locally in an intermittent cross-fire of clerical exchanges.<sup>56</sup> Though it caused no open



division, this early pulpit war, fought against the backdrop of the war for America, formed an ominous prelude to the tensions of the next decade. Most vehement among the participants was John Riland, Edward Burn's fiercely evangelical superior at St. Mary's. This was a new church, built and endowed by public subscription between 1774 and 1776.<sup>57</sup> The choice of Riland as its first incumbent was therefore significant. Riland, a former curate of Henry Venn at Huddersfield and another ex-member of Wesley's projected preaching union of 1764, was prominent among Methodism's early Anglican supporters.<sup>58</sup> As Rector of Sutton Coldfield until 1820, he was later famous in the Midlands as a fire-and-brimstone preacher. Certainly, the culminating tirade of his 1775 Fast Sermon on *The sinful state of the nation and expectation of God's judgement upon it* was worthy of Henry Sacheverell himself. Having deplored the open tolerance of Arianism, atheism and infidelity and having particularly traduced as false brethren the 'liberal' Anglican clergy who had recently petitioned for a relief to tender conscience in matter of subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles, he turned to the Dissenters themselves whose,

spirit and behaviour, in all malignity of it, exceeds the reach of any pencil, much more mine, to paint in its proper colours, I therefore leave them...only with this remark, that if GOD for the transgression of our land thus permits the overthrow of our Church and State, we shall have, in this century, in a very considerable degree, to thank the deistical and factious dissenters for this great evil, as in the last, to thank their forefathers, the puritans, for the very same.<sup>59</sup>

Such a peroration from Birmingham's newest and most proprietary pulpit, fully five years before Priestley's own arrival at the New Meeting, certainly suggests that the fires of 1791 had already been laid, even if the match was not yet to hand. To Riland, preaching on a national fast-day at the start of the war for America, it was no doubt natural to hark back directly to the period of the Civil War for the obvious sources of apprehended danger to Church and State, without giving much thought to what had changed in the interval. It would, however, be wrong to conclude from his words that what existed in late eighteenth-century Birmingham was a simple and essentially unchanged polarity between the 'orthodox' defenders of a 'Confessional State' on the one hand and the 'heterodox' hosts of Midian on the other. A closer examination of the town's experience during the previous half-century suggests that if 'orthodoxy' had cause to fear, it was as much because of the new uncertainties which were assailing and changing its own position as it was due to the old enemy without. The fires of 1791 may have been laid, but their fuel was more complex than it seems at first sight. It

remains to be seen how it was ignited, and what was left when the flames had been extinguished.

University of Victoria.

Part Two of this article will appear in the next issue.

1. Particularly in J.R. Jacob, *Robert Boyle and the English Revolution* (New York, 1976), M.C. Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution* (Brighton, 1976), and *The radical Enlightenment: pantheist, freemasons and republicans* (London, 1981), and in numerous articles by the same authors separately and severally. For the Anti-Newtonian aspect, which from the point of view of religious ideas and church history is equally, if not more important, despite the seeming strangeness of its natural philosophy, see A.J. Kuhn, 'Glory or Gravity: Hutchinson versus Newton', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XXII (1961), 303-322; C.B. Wilde, 'Hutchinsonianism, natural philosophy and religious controversy in 18th century England', *History of Science*, XVIII (1980), 1-24; and 'Matter and spirit as natural symbols in eighteenth-century British natural philosophy', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 15, no.2 (July 1982), 99-131. The historiography of the relationship is discussed in the essays of Rom Harre, Simon Schaffer and Steven Shapin in G.S. Rousseau and R. Porter eds., *The ferment of knowledge: studies in the historiography of eighteenth-century science* (Cambridge, 1980).
2. Especially Jonathan Barry, 'Piety and the patient: medicine and religion in eighteenth-century Bristol', in Roy Porter ed., *Patients and practitioners* (Cambridge, 1985), 145-175.
3. J. Money, *Experience and identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1800* (Manchester, Montreal, 1977).
4. J.C.D. Clark, *English society, 1688-1832: ideology, social structure and political practice during the ancien regime in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (Cambridge, 1986). Joseph Priestley and his fate certainly provides—on the face of it at any rate—the most obvious example for Clark's general contention that eighteenth and early nineteenth-century radicalism was rooted in 'heterodox' religion, not in the steady advance of secular possessive individualism. Whether the majority's reaction to Priestley was simply the uniform response of an 'ancien regime' mentality, or of an orthodox 'confessional state', or something altogether more complex is another question.
5. See R.B. Rose in *Victoria County History, Warwickshire*, VII, 279 ff., and 'The Priestley Riots of 1791', *Past and Present*, 18 (Nov. 1960), 68-88.
6. R.B. Rose, 'The Origins of working class radicalism in Birmingham', *Labour History* (Canberra, Australia), 4 (Nov. 1965), 6-14.
7. Cf. for example the general impression conveyed by R.E. Schofield, *The Lunar Society of Birmingham, a social history of provincial science and industry in eighteenth-century England* (Oxford, 1963).
8. Edward Gibbon, *Memoirs of my life and writings*, ed. J.B. Bury (Oxford, 1907, repr., 1962), 186-187: 'In his *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*, Dr. Priestley threw down his two gauntlets to Bishop Hurd and Mr. Gibbon. I declined the challenge in a letter, exhorting my opponent to enlighten the world by his philosophical discoveries, and to remember that the merit of his predecessor Servetus is now reduced to a single passage, which indicates the smaller circulation of the blood, from and to the heart. Instead of listening to this friendly advice, the dauntless philosopher of Birmingham continued to fire away his double battery



- against those who believed too little, and those who believed too much. From my replies he has nothing to hope or fear, but his Socinian shield has repeatedly been pierced by the mighty spear of Horsley and his trumpet of sedition may at length awaken the magistrates of a free country.'
9. 'Natural philosophy and public spectacle in the eighteenth century', *History of Science*, XXI (1983), 1-43; c.f. also Schaffer, 'Priestley's questions: an historiographic survey', *ibid*, XXII (1984), 151-188.
  10. On the social connotations of different cosmologies, see Steven Shapin, 'Social uses of science', in Rousseau and Porter, *The ferment of knowledge*. Links between seventeenth-century pantheism and eighteenth-century egalitarianism are discussed in Margaret Jacob, *The radical Enlightenment*.
  11. Besides the articles by Schaffer already cited, see J. McEvoy and J.E. McGuire, 'God and nature: Priestley's way of Rational Dissent', *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences*, VI (1975), 325-404; J. McEvoy, 'Electricity, knowledge and the nature of progress in Priestley's thought', *British Journal for the History of Science*, XII (1979), 1-30; Jack Fruchtman Jr., 'The apocalyptic politics of Richard Price and Joseph Priestley: a study in late eighteenth-century millennialism', *Trans. American Philosophical Society*, 73 (1983), pt. 4; Isaac Kramnick, 'Eighteenth century science and radical social theory; the case of Joseph Priestley's scientific liberalism', *Journal of British Studies*, 25 (1986), 1-30.
  12. Quoted Schaffer, 'Priestley's questions', 157.
  13. Schaffer, 'Natural philosophy', 25.
  14. See Schaffer, 'Priestley's questions', 155-156, for the persistent attribution of Priestley's apparent 'failure' to grasp the significance of Lavoisier's chemical system to his theological and metaphysical preoccupations, either as 'distraction' from his science, or as the deep-seated, but predisposing source of it.
  15. The expression is that of Joseph Kilmister, secretary of the Birmingham Society for Constitutional Information in a letter to the London Corresponding Society, 6 Nov. 1793, P.R.O., TS 11/953/3497.
  16. Roy Porter, 'Science, provincial culture and public opinion, in Enlightenment England', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, III (1980), 20-46.
  17. For a full account of what follows, see my *Experience and identity*, *passim*.
  18. For Baskerville and his circle, which needs a full investigation, see William Bennet, *John Baskerville, the Birmingham printer: his press, relations and friends*, 2 vols. (Birmingham, 1937); Schofield, *Lunar Society*, 23-24; P. Gaskell, *John Baskerville, a bibliography* (Cambridge, 1959); and Joseph Hill, *The bookmakers and booksellers of Old Birmingham*, (Birmingham, 1907).
  19. P.R.O., Home Office Papers, H.O. 42/25, John Brooke to Evan Nepean, 7 June 1793.
  20. The club is believed to have been founded to subscribe to the weekly numbers of Samuel Richardson's novels. In 1758, it was listed among the subscribers to *Thoughts moral and divine*, by the Masonic author, Wellins Calcott. For Calcott's Masonic affiliations, see Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, 141, f.n. 48.
  21. This view of eighteenth-century Birmingham is strongly corroborated by an unpublished paper by Maxine Berg, 'The city and the industrial revolution: commerce, creativity and custom in eighteenth-century Birmingham'. I am very grateful to her for the opportunity to see this.
  22. Cf., P.R.O., H.O. 42/7, 'Calculation of the duty on shops', Sept. 1785.
  23. For this see, Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, *The birth of a consumer society: the commercialization of eighteenth-century England* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1982).

24. Schaffer, 'Natural philosophy and public spectacle', 9; A.E. Musson & Eric Robinson, *Science and technology in the industrial revolution* (Manchester, 1969), 144; Aris' *Birmingham Gazette*, 27 Oct., 3 Nov., 9 Dec. 1746, 3 Jan. 1757. For Thomas Yeomans' Northampton origins and career, which again point to the difference between Birmingham's eighteenth and nineteenth-century associations, see Alan Everitt, 'Country county and town: patterns of regional growth in England', *Trans. Royal Historical Society*, 5th Series, 29 (1979), 79-108, at 102.
25. Griffiths: *Aris*, 14 April, 5 May 1755; *Farley's Bristol Journal*, 20, 27 Sept. 1755. Ferguson: *Aris*, 24 Aug., 7 Sept. 1761, 15 July 1771; *Farley*, 4 Jan. 1766. Arden: *Aris*, 11 July 1763, 29 April 1765, 17 May, 2 Aug. 1773; *Farley*, 1769-1770, *passim*. Schaffer, *loc.cit.*
26. *Aris*, 4 Nov. 1776, which mentions previous courses of experiments in Bath and Bristol, though Warltire did not appear by name in *Farley* until 13 Dec. 1777. For Warltire more generally, whose itinerary by the 1780s included many of the lesser town in the Midlands and the Potteries, as well as the main centres; see Schofield, *Lunar Society*, *passim*. For the ramifications of philosophical speculation in eighteenth-century Bristol, see especially Jonathan Barry, 'Piety and the patient', *loc.cit.*, and 'Publicity and the public good: presenting medicine in eighteenth-century Bristol', in W. Bynum & Roy Porter eds., *Medical fringe and medical orthodoxy, 1750-1850* (London, 1987); also in the same volume, M. Neve, 'Orthodoxy and fringe: medicine in late Georgian Bristol'.
27. *Aris*, 14 Sept. 1778.
28. *Aris*, 12 Aug. 1776.
29. *Aris*, 13 Aug., 3 Sept., 5 and 12 Nov. 1781. For the significance of Adam Walker in particular, see below.
30. J.A. Langford, *A century of Birmingham life: a chronicle of local events, 1741-1841*, 2 vols. (Birmingham, 1868), I, 425 ff.
31. The Buildwas earthquake, which was reported in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1773, pp.281-282), attracted similar attention elsewhere too, especially from John Wesley and his close associate, the Reverend John Fletcher of Madeley. See N. Curnock ed., *The Journal of John Wesley*, 8 vols. (London, 1915), V, 517, 521-522, entries for 12 & 13 July 1773.
32. It was caused by a rising body of inflammable air, 'of which a great abundance is discharged from stagnant pools...hence like a cork in water, it rises to the upper part of our atmosphere in a combined state, and lightning being much more frequent in the upper parts...than nearer the Earth's surface, a flash of lightning would set Fire to this inflammable air, then it would burn for a considerable time, and action and reaction being equal and contrary, the Fire blazing from this inflammable air would cause such a reaction as to give it motion, and so it would continue burning, moving and casting a long tail of fire behind as it went until all the Inflammable air was burnt away, and then we should lose sight of it, like a shooting star (as they are vulgarly and erroneously stated), for both these phenomena arise from the very same cause, the only difference being that one is on a much smaller scale than the other.' Langford, *Birmingham Life*, I, 377; cf. Schaffer, 'Natural philosophy and public spectacle', 16-17, on the portentous connotations of atmospheric phenomena in the later decades of the century.
33. *Aris*, 15 Nov. 1784, 13 and 20 Nov. 1786.
34. *Aris*, 9 Feb., 25 May, 25 Jan. 1790.
35. For cruel sports in the Black Country, see R.W. Malcolmson, *Popular recreation in English society, 1700-1850* (Cambridge, 1973). Several of the convivial jingles written by John Freeth, the Wilkite landlord of the Leicester Arms and host of the

- Birmingham Book Club, would today find an instant place in a rugby club song book. At least one, 'The jovial cocker', celebrated cockfighting. To judge by its order-sheets, the Free Debating Society's proceedings at the Red Lion showed a similar mixture.
36. Schaffer, 'Natural philosophy and public spectacle', 10-11. Schaffer cites Hillel Schwarz's description of enthusiasm among the French prophets in Augustan London as 'a flash of fire' or 'an unusual warmth diffus'd like lightning'. Schwarz, *Knives, fools and madmen and that subtle effluvia* (Gainesville, Florida, 1978), 35 and 47. Compare this with the description of Yeomans' exhibition in *Aris*, 20 and 27 October 1746. 'The person electrified by this apparatus emits fire from all parts of the body upon the touch of another with great force, and fires spirits of wine with his finger. Likewise the commotion is felt by every person in the room.' Outside London, Birmingham was one of the places most affected by the French Prophets' English disciples. See below.
  37. Cf. Hillel Schwarz, *The French prophets* (Newhaven, 1977), and the essays by Schaffer and Shapin in Rousseau and Porter, *The Ferment of knowledge*.
  38. Beside's William Law's four-volume edition of *The Works of Jacob Behmen the Teutonic philosopher*, published in 1764, at least two shorter introductions to the German mystic were available: a translation of his *Way to Christ discovered*, published in Manchester in 1752 (Schwarz, *French prophets*, 213), and Law's *Key of Jacob Boehme and Explanation of the deep principles of Jacob Behmen in thirteen figures*. See the edition by Adam McLean (Magnum Corpus Hermeticum Reprints, Edinburgh, 1981), which, however, gives no date for the original.
  39. On Hutchinsonianism, see references in f.n.1 above; also G.N. Cantor, 'Revelation and the cyclical cosmos of John Hutchinson', in L. Jordanova and R. Porter eds., *Images of the earth* (Chalfont St. Giles, 1979); R. Porter and M. Neve, 'Alexander Catcott: glory and geology', *British Journal for the History of Science*, X (1977), 37-59. More generally, see Porter, *The making of geology: earth science in Britain, 1660-1815* (Cambridge, 1977), and 'Creation and credence: the career of theories of the earth in Britain, 1660-1820', in B. Barnes and S. Shapin eds., *Natural order: historical studies of scientific culture* (Beverly Hills, 1979).
  40. For this paragraph I am greatly indebted to 'The Enlightenment and the chemical revolution', an unpublished paper by John McEvoy given to the 1987 conference of the Canadian Association for Eighteenth-Century Studies. Within a common set of enlightenment assumptions which they both shared, McEvoy compares and contrasts the differing views of Priestley and Lavoisier on the nature of language and its influence on their respective concepts of experimental method and of the relative importance of 'fact' and 'theory' in science. McEvoy concludes that 'Priestley's view of the cognitive status and function of language marks an empiricist half-way point between the Renaissance doctrine of natural signatures and the Classical theory of conventional signs.' My own purpose here is to explore the wider implications of this general transition for the language of the revival; and in particular to suggest that as this too moved towards the 'classical' pole in its theological exposition, its social message conflicted increasingly sharply with that implied by the residual realism of Priestleyan science.
  41. Cf. ms. notes in the Bristol Reference Library copy of Alexander Catcott, *The superior and inferiour Elahim: a sermon preached before the Corporation of Bristol and the Lord Chief Justice Hardwicke...16th August 1735, being the day before the assizes* (London, 1736). For Catcott, who in 1738 wrote a formal Hutchinsonian *Tractatus, in quo tentatur conamen recuperandi notitiam principiorum veteris et verae philosophiae*, and his equally Hutchinsonian son and successor, see f.n. 39 above.

- For Bristol politics, see Linda Colley, *In Defiance of oligarchy: the Tory Party, 1714-60* (Cambridge, 1982), 138-140. Besides its significant local timing, Catcott's assize sermon also coincided with a more general resurgence of ecclesiastical political pressure on the Walpole ministry. Cf. Stephen Taylor, 'Sir Robert Walpole, the Church of England and the Quaker's Tithe Bill of 1736', *Historical Journal*, 28 (1985), 51-77.
42. G.N. Cantor, 'The theological significance of ethers', in G.N. Cantor and M.J.S. Hodge eds., *Conceptions of ether: studies in the history of ether theories, 1740-1900* (Cambridge, 1981) 135-155.
  43. R.E. Schofield, 'John Wesley and science in eighteenth-century England', *Isis*, 44 (1953) 331-440.
  44. See, J.B. Green, *John Wesley and William Law* (London, 1945), and, *Journal*, IV, 409-410.
  45. Richard Symes, *Fire analysed, or the several parts of which it is compounded clearly demonstrated by experiments; the teutonic philosophy proved true by the same experiments, and the manner and method of making electricity medicinal and healing confirmed in a variety of cures* (Bristol, 1771).
  46. For controversies within Methodism in the 1760s and 1770s, see Wesley, *Journal*, V, passim. The main issues are effectively outlined in Stanley Ayling, *John Wesley* (London, 1979), and specifically treated in two important articles by Frederick Dreyer which for almost the first time consider evangelical ideas in proper relationship to contemporary thought instead of dismissing them as merely irrational survivals or aberrations: 'Faith and experience in the thought of John Wesley', *American Historical Review*, 88 (1983), 19-20, and 'Evangelical thought: John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards', *Albion*, 19, 2 (Summer, 1987), 177-192.
  47. Cf. Bernard Semmel, *The Methodist revolution* (New York, 1973); R.M. Kingdon, 'Laissez faire or government control: a problem for John Wesley', *Church History*, 26 (1957), 342-354.
  48. Cf. J. Telford ed., *The letters of John Wesley*, 8 vols. (London, 1931), VII, 117-178, Wesley to John Atlay, 4 April 1782, re. deletions to be made from *Hymns for the nation*. Amos VIII, 2, reads: 'Then said the Lord unto me. The end is come upon my people Israel: I will not pass by them any more. And the songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord...Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the Land to fall. Saying When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? And the sabbath that we may sell wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances with deceit. That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat. The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob. Surely I will never forget any of their works....' Other deletions included hymns 'for the loyal Americans' and 'for the conversion of the French'. Wesley was clearly adjusting to a new reality. Cf. E.P. Thompson, 'The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century', *Past and Present*, 50 (Feb. 1971) 76-136.
  49. Cf. Schwarz, *French prophets*, 105, 114-115, 194 ff. The Midlands' strong connection with the French prophets began as early as 1705, when Jonathan Taylor, a Birmingham cutler and two companions, Richard Wharton and Stephen Halford, were inspired by the death of Dr. Thomas Emes and his prophesied resurrection. Halford, who had Quaker connections, was to be the subject of similar prophecies. Taylor, Wharton and most notably Wharton's wife, Hannah, established one of the strongest and most enduring prophetic groups in the country. Hannah, who published her *Divine Inspiration* in 1732, was also active in Worcester, where her followers were closely associated with the circle of two other prophets, Jean Alut and



- Newton's quondam millenarian disciple, Nicholas Fatio de Duillier, who was much concerned with the religious implications of Newton's physics. The two circles eventually diverged over Hannah Wharton's insistence on the community of possessions, but they formed a crucial part of the context of Methodism in the Midlands. When John Wesley began his ministry in Bristol in 1738, some of his earliest personal encounters were among the Quakers, who had links with the circle of the Birmingham prophethess.
50. Birmingham Reference Library, *Catalogue of T. Lucas's Circulating Library* (1788); *VCH Warwicks*, VII, 417, 479-480; Langford, *Birmingham life*, I, 368-369; Geoffrey Rowell, 'The origins and history of Universalist Societies in Britain, 1750-1850', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, XXII (1971), 35-56, at 41. The Birmingham Library held at least three sets of Swedenborg (see Catalogue for 1798 in Birmingham Reference Library). For Priestley's close relations with local Swedenborgians, see Part II of this article.
  51. John Freeth, *The political songster, 1771* (Birmingham, 1771), 95ff. This was the Baskerville edition of the *Songster*. Freeth's 'Hudibrastic Epistle' was originally inspired two years earlier by Myles Swinney's serialization of Voltaire on religion in *The Warwickshire Journal*. For Machin, see *Aris*, 13 July 1767, 19 Dec. 1768. Beyond the three r's and some geometry and algebra, Machin's first advertisement simply said that he taught 'the learned languages'. Besides Hebrew and Chaldee, his later list specified Latin, Greek, Geometry, Algebra, Heraldry, Architecture, Logic, Metaphysics, Oratory ('or the art of composition') and Rhetoric ('or the art of speaking'). He also offered evening classes. There is no specific indication that Machin was a Hutchinsonian or was aiming at such clientele, but his additional offer to teach various denominational catechisms where required suggests a religious rather than a utilitarian bias to his instruction, and even if he was just out to impress prospective customers with his learning it is difficult to understand why he else he would offer to teach Hebrew and Chaldee in a place like Birmingham.
  52. Cf. for example, *Journal*, III, 237-238, 22-23 March 1746, at Wednesbury: conversation with Stephen Timmins, and later the same day, in Birmingham, with 'J---W---': "Do you believe you have nothing to do with the law of God?" "I have not; I am not under the law; I live by faith". "Have you as living by faith, a right to everything in the world?" "I have....I may [take anything], if I want it; for it is mine. Only I will not give offence" This right included, "all the women in the world...if they consent." "And is that not a sin?" "Yes, to him that thinks it is a sin; but not to those whose hearts are free." Still more germane is Sarah B..., interviewed at Birmingham, 22 March 1753 (IV, 55): "I am in heaven in the spirit; but I can speak in the flesh. I am not that which appears, but that which disappears. I always pray, and yet I never pray, for what I can pray for? I have all...I know but two in the world: God is one and the devil is the other...Adam never sinned; and no man sins now; it is only the devil." "And will no man ever be damned?" "No man ever will." "Nor the devil?" "I am not sure; but I believe not," "Do you receive the sacrament?" "No, I do not want it." "Is the word of God your rule?" "Yes, the Word made flesh; but not the letter. I am in the spirit..."
  53. *Journal*, 4 April 1755, 16 April 1757, 12-13 March 1761, 19 March 1768, 17 March 1770, 18-22 March 1774, 25-27 March 1776, 6-7 July 1782, 25 March 1785, 19-21 March 1786, 22 March 1788, 19 March 1790; *VCH Warwicks*, VII, 417; W.C. Sheldon, *Early Methodism in Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1903). According to Sheldon, the earliest Methodists in the Birmingham area were drawn more from Old Dissent than from the Established Church, and were influenced as much, if not more by Whitefield, a succession of Welsh preachers and the notorious antinomian Roger

- Ball, as they were by Wesley and his brother. The local connection between the early revival and the Huguenot community is corroborated by Wesley's frequent sojourns with the Neweys, a family of Flemish Protestant refugees which had settled in Birmingham and Wolverhampton, during his visits to the area. The three chapels, opened between 1782 and 1789 in Cherry Street, Bradford Street, and Coleshill Street, had a total seating accommodation of approximately 2,700. During Wesley's later visits, many hundreds more were frequently turned away.
54. J.W. Showell, *The early history of the Baptists in Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1858), 30. Burn also preached occasionally in the Baptist Meeting House in Cannon Street.
  55. For the society's order sheets, see *Aris*, 1774-1775.
  56. Cf. J. Gaunt, *The impossibility of obtaining salvation by faith without obedience* (three sermons in St. Martin's, 1769); James Turner, *The covenants of works and grace explained* (Cannon Street Baptist Meeting, 1770); John Parsons, *The doctrine of salvation* (two sermons, St. Martin's, 1770), and *Remarks on three sermons lately published under the title, 'The impossibility of obtaining salvation by faith without obedience'* (1770); William Toy Young, *Sermon preached at St. Martin's on the death of the Revd. John Parsons* (1778); 'Alumnus', *Fanatical divinity exposed, or remarks on a sermon on the death of the Revd. John Parson by the Revd. William Toy Young* (1778).
  57. *VCH Warwicks*, VII, 368.
  58. For Riland, see Wesley, *Journal*, V, 63. Samuel Pipe-Wolferstan of Statfold, Staffordshire (between Tamworth and Lichfield), heard Riland at Sutton Coldfield in Advent, 1793. Riland's curate officiated and 'read uncommonly well', but 'his rector, who will not let him preach, did it himself; something, though not highly, in the enthusiastic style he is celebrated for, and with some vulgarity; from notes at most, if that.' Diary of Samuel Pipe-Wolferstan (transcript in the Staffordshire Record Office), 22 Dec. 1793.
  59. John Riland, *The sinful state of the nation; and the expectation of God's judgement upon it, with the way to save us from ruin, considered in two discourses, preached in St. Mary's Chapel, Birmingham, 1775* (Birmingham, 1776).



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## BRITAIN AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

A Conference to held at the Maison Française, Oxford,  
13-15 April 1789.

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### PROGRAMME

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THURSDAY 13 APRIL Lecture One:

*The Debate on France.* A joint lecture on the origins of radicalism and the impact of events in France 1789-97.

Professor Gunther Lottes, Universität Regensburg:

'Radicalism, Revolution and Political culture:

An Anglo-French Comparison'.

Dr. John Dinwiddy, Royal Holloway and Bedford New College,  
London:

'Burke and the English Anti-Jacobins'.

FRIDAY 14 APRIL Lecture Two:

*The War with France.* The impact of the war on the internal politics of Britain and France 1792-1801.

Dr. Clive Emsley, Open University:

'War, Revolution and Nationalism: the British and French Experience 1792-1801'.

SATURDAY 15 APRIL Lecture Three:

*Reform, Reaction and Revolution.* A joint lecture providing contrasting assessments of the extent to which democratic and reform movements constituted a failed or suppressed revolution.

Professor Ian Christie, Emeritus, University of London.

'Conservatism and Stability in British Society'.

Dr. Roger Wells, Brighton Polytechnic:

'English Society and Revolutionary Politics in the 1790s:  
The Case for Insurrection'.

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## WILLIAM GODWIN: SOCIAL CRITIQUE IN PHILOSOPHY AND FICTION

Ken Edward Smith

In his preface to *Things as they are: or, the adventures of Caleb Williams*, withdrawn from the first edition because of the treason trials of 1794, Godwin outlines as clearly as he can the socio-political implications of the book. After remarking that 'It is known to philosophers that the spirit and character of government intrudes itself into every rank of society'<sup>1</sup> and that this truth should be propagated more widely than philosophical books can hope to do, he gives us the rationale of this particular novel: 'Accordingly, it was proposed in the invention of the following work, to comprehend, as far as the progressive nature of a single story would allow, a general review of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism, by which man becomes the destroyer of man.'<sup>2</sup>

It is at least arguable that, had Godwin not changed his main title from *Things as they are*, to *Caleb Williams* in 1831 and written a new account of the work's composition in his introduction to *Fleetwood*, then some of the alternative, less political readings of the novel might not have gained such wide currency in modern times. Yet Godwin's 1831 thoughts on the novel would hardly have been so influential had they not carried with them an intrinsic plausibility and power. His comments on the progress of the action, drawing attention to its reverse order of narrative conception, point up that sense of psychological mystery and claustrophobia which has held so many readers since Hazlitt right to the last page:

I formed a conception of a book of fictitious adventure, that in some way should be distinguished by a very powerful interest. Pursuing this idea, I invented first the third volume of the tale, and last of all the first. I bent myself to the conception of a series of adventures of flight and pursuit; the fugitive in perpetual apprehension of being overwhelmed with the worst calamities, and the pursuer, by his ingenuity and resources, keeping his victim in a state of the most fearful alarm. This was the project of my third volume.<sup>3</sup>

From this Gothic psychology of fear, persecution and anxious flight it is perhaps not a great step to those metaphysical implications seized on by some modern critics. May not the story be seen as a symbolic narrative in which an avenging God pursues and punishes the rebel who has dared to investigate and question his power?

That there exists socio-political and religious-metaphysical readings of *Caleb Williams*, taking off in opposite directions from the same starting point of psychological clash and torment, is interesting for at least two reasons. Specifically, it leads us to look in detail at the evidence adduced by the different camps to see whether we can indeed suggest one set of primary interpretations for the novel or whether, as B.J. Tysdahl has suggested, we must settle for a duck/rabbit alternation of gestalts.<sup>4</sup> At a more general level, it raises interesting questions about how we interpret the important sub-genre of the philosophical novel, that is the novel written around his or her central concerns by a writer simultaneously working through rigorous abstract arguments in the same areas of concern. The existence and interpretative status of this sub-genre is a topic to which I shall return later.

First, though, we must consider in detail the arguments produced for largely political and largely religious interpretations of *Caleb Williams* and subsequent attempts to reconcile the two. Both chronologically and in terms of its directness, P.N. Furbank's 1955 article 'Godwin's novels' provides a good starting point for a political reading of *Caleb Williams*:

In this plot *Caleb Williams* is clearly Godwin himself, Falkland the *ancien régime*, and the opening of the trunk is the writing of *Political Justice*. The secret of the trunk is the secret which Godwin brings to the light of day in *Political Justice*, the guilty secret of government: and in describing Caleb's fierce glee and terror at making the discovery he is describing his own emotion at conceiving the theories of that work.<sup>5</sup>

The idea that in Falkland, Godwin symbolises 'the whole idea of Honour...the spirit of Monarchy made visible' is developed further and more specifically by James T. Boulton in his *The language of politics in the age of Wilkes and Burke*.<sup>6</sup> Boulton mounts the case for seeing Falkland as a very direct dramatic transcript of Burke as Godwin would elsewhere portray him. In particular we are shown the consonance between Godwin's elegy for Burke in the third edition of *Political Justice* and Caleb's final tribute to Falkland in the revised version of the novel's ending. Only the more personalised tone of the extract from *Caleb Williams* differentiates the two awed, melancholy tributes to a deeply flawed sublimity of character and talents:

In all that is most exalted in talents, I regard him as the inferior of no man that ever adorned the face of the earth; and, in the long record of human genius, I can find for him very few equals...He has unfortunately left us a memorable example of the power of a corrupt system of government, to undermine and divert from their genuine purposes, the noblest purposes, the noblest faculties that have yet been exhibited to the observation of the world.<sup>7</sup>

and,

A nobler spirit lived not among the sons of men. Thy intellectual powers were truly sublime, and thy bosom burned with godlike ambition. But of what use are the talents and sentiments in the corrupt wilderness of human society? It is a rank and rotten soil, from which every finer shrub draws poison as it grows.<sup>8</sup>

That belief in honour and chivalry so clearly displayed in the Marie Antoinette passage of *Reflections* can, it is suggested, be aligned with much in Falkland's life. We might cite his early adventures in Italy and of course his need to defend his honour so bloodily in the case of Tyrrel. It is, incidentally, also possible to see Tyrrel himself in this context since he can be seen as embodying those more unvarnished and obviously brutal aspects of the *ancien régime* which Falkland begins by destroying only to replace them with a subtler and more refined oppression. This transition in Falkland can in turn be seen as an oblique commentary on Burke's role in relation to the American and French Revolutions.

Such claims for the political significance of the novel are, however, in need of development since they depend mainly on early plot developments and on a characterization of Falkland's role in them. What of the main narrative content, particularly the repeated emphasis on legal proceedings and the role of justice to be found in court and prison scenes, passages of flight, sojourns with *banditti* and so on? As Don Locke has pointed out there is a sense in which 'politics and government seem to figure in the novel not at all.'<sup>9</sup> However, when we bear in mind Godwin's prefatory comment on the 'sanguinary plot...against the liberties of Englishmen' in 1794 and the fact that he was writing the end of the novel while visiting in prison the radical Joseph Gerrald (about to be sentenced to fourteen years transportation), then the direct relevance of legal matters to political tyranny becomes apparent. More theoretically, Godwin himself in a letter to the *British Critic* stressed the extent to which the novel's analysis of the legal system is designed to undermine the reader's general faith in political institutions. Thus the specifics of unjustified arrest, miserable imprisonment and unjust trial point beyond themselves to the broader purpose of the novel:

It is to expose the evils which arise out of the present system of civilized society; and having exposed them, to lead the enquiring reader to examine whether they are or are not, as has commonly been supposed, irremediable; in a word to disengage the minds of men from prepossession, and to launch them upon the sea of moral and political enquiry.<sup>10</sup>

At this point, rather than progressing to more sophisticated developments of these political interpretations, it may be as well to proceed



dialectically to consider the opposed viewpoints—if only because the historical sequence of the argument has tended to follow this route. That is, an interregnum of more religious interpretations has been followed by more subtle attempts to reinstate political readings. We may begin, then, by pointing out that even that cornerstone of those who aligned *Caleb Williams* with *Political Justice*, the character of Falkland, is open to question (and by extension our judgement of Caleb). Don Locke argues that Falkland is positively endorsed by the text to a degree which endangers the author's apparent intentions: 'so far from revealing aristocratic values as a perversion of true morality, Caleb Williams seems to endorse them, implying that the intrinsic worth of Falkland can survive even the most malevolent actions. Godwin's moral is one thing; but the tendency of the book, its actual effect upon the reader, seems quite another.'<sup>11</sup> It is undoubtedly striking that in the second, apparently positive, ending of the novel, Caleb should follow up his reconciliation with Falkland with bitter self criticism. Admittedly, there is an ostensible justification for this remorse: Caleb should have told Falkland of his suffering at his hands so that Falkland's noble nature and humanity would have been touched. But the self-hatred of Caleb seems to go far beyond any justified remorse about an error committed *in extremis* and under psychological torture. Is this figure the disinterested philosopher-victim courageously unmasking tyranny?:

I have been his murderer. It was fit that he should praise my patience, who has fallen a victim, life and fame, to my precipitation! It would have been merciful in comparison, if I had planted a dagger in his heart. He would have thanked me for my kindness. But atrocious, execrable wretch that I have been! I wantonly inflicted on him an anguish a thousand times worse than death. Meanwhile I endure the penalty of my crime. His figure is ever in imagination before me. Waking or sleeping I still behold him.<sup>12</sup>

Such extremity of guilt has not unnaturally led towards an invocation of Godwin's Sandemanian past. There is stress on Falkland's God-like power from our early introduction to a voice 'supernaturally tremendous'<sup>13</sup> right through to Caleb's end-of-his-tether questionings: 'Did his power reach through all space, and his eye penetrate every concealment? Was he like that mysterious being, to protect us from whose fierce revenge mountains and hills we are told might fall on us in vain?'<sup>14</sup> Walter Allen has most fully articulated for us the implications for the whole narrative which might be drawn from such passages:

Godwin overthrew God, and having done so, went on to finish the job by overthrowing, on paper at any rate, the very basis of all government, secular and ecclesiastical. But thorough-going intellectual though he was, emancipated from the "mind-forg'd manacles" as he might conceive

himself to be, he was still tied to God emotionally by the profoundest sentiments of fear and remorse for his actions, tied to Him perhaps even by love.

...Falkland himself tells him(Caleb): "You might as well think of escaping from the power of the omnipresent god as mine!" This the progress of the novel proves to be true. And when Williams does kill Falkland he realizes he has killed the being whom he most dearly loves.

My conclusion, then, is that Caleb Williams is not, as it has been conventionally assumed, an allegory of the political state of England in the seventeen-nineties, but rather a symbolic statement of the author's relation to God.<sup>15</sup>

The very existence of such powerfully-articulated challenges to the traditional views of *Caleb Williams* has led almost inevitably to the search for a refurbished political reading. Thus we begin to find more subtle examples of the latter which do not depend so literally on specific items of narrative content. Of these two are particularly noteworthy: Marilyn Butler's re-reading of the novel in the context of the 1790s and Mark Philp's very rigorous linking of the book with certain philosophical concepts.

Marilyn Butler, apart from presenting a good deal evidence that *Caleb Williams* affected later editions of *Political Justice*, employs the concept of hierarchy as a central notion for tying together the two works. Although this concentration on the novel's critique of hierarchy may not seem so distant from Boulton's stress on the critique of aristocracy, it has the advantage of accounting for the presence of religious language without losing the sense of a dominantly secular outlook in the novel. For Butler the religious overtones of Falkland's behaviour and language are part of a psychological terror, an implied threat of supernatural sanctions against those who threaten the existing social hierarchy. Thus, both in Burke's *Reflections* and in the novel, it is the rhetorical use of religious language as a language of power rather than of truth which is in question. Religious awe is not present in its own right but is counterfeited for functional reasons, so that Caleb may be subdued by external authority and inward fear: 'Godwin's own early religious experiences undoubtedly gave him insight into the effect upon an impressionable mind when religious terror of this sort is invoked...Falkland threatens Caleb terrifyingly invoking an ancient language of dominance,—temporal authority backed by religion,—and the youthful Caleb withdraws in silence, "irresolute, over-awed and abashed".'<sup>16</sup>

Seen in this light the religious overtones of *Caleb Williams* are felt to be allied with, and not at variance with, its social and legal strictures,



both being in different ways signs of the sense in which 'Godwin in *Caleb Williams* enacts coercion'.<sup>17</sup> Not merely the institutions of the *ancien régime* but the potentially dangerous capacity of radicals to be taken in by those institutions, 'their veneration for hereditary leaders and vulnerability to the hypnotic rhetoric of paternal authority sanctioned by religion' are being dramatized here.<sup>18</sup>

Although very different from Marilyn's Butler's approach, Mark Philp's reappraisal in his *Godwin's Political Justice* has one important thing in common with it, that is its taking of a central element of its opponent's case and suggesting an alternative significance for it. Here it is not the religious overtones *per se* that are being looked at but the intensely symbiotic relationship between Caleb and Falkland. Once more Godwin would later provide a Gothic-psychological underpinning to fuel psychoanalytic accounts. But Philp argues that we can see this involuted relationship not as a diversion from the social critique of the novel but as central to it. What we see in the progress between the two is a destructive social interaction which Philp terms a mixed-motive game where two individuals in conflict are interdependent (what each does depends on what he thinks the other will do and so on *ad infinitum*). Furthermore, agreements between them are always unstable because there inevitably comes a point where the desire for advantage leads one to break the agreement and thus no mutual trust is possible. The description Philp gives us shows us this destructive interaction working its way out and reveals the roots of such atomistic behaviour in a divided and divisive social order: 'Falkland and Caleb are forced to take ever more drastic steps to preserve their own security and interests in the light of the other's behaviour. Gradually both arrive at the point where their sole concern is self-preservation. Godwin's purpose in introducing and developing the logic of antagonistic bargaining over competing interests is to show us that contemporary society has precisely this effect - he shows us how "man becomes the destroyer of man"'.<sup>19</sup> In a real sense we cannot do full justice to his argument here, for Mark Philp reinforces it by examining key elements of the narrative in its light. But at least its powerful possibilities as an explanatory paradigm may be suggested.

It may now be suggested that we have reached the stage of discovering that socio-political readings of the novel can not only be much more subtle than earlier critics had supposed but also that they can take on board and reinterpret psychological or religious data first cited by their opponents. But of course this does not mean that these opposing views have been refuted. The possibility, often encountered in

literary analysis, of genuine ambiguity cannot be ruled out. In fact the thought that both sets of interpretations are in some sense valid has been put forward at length by B.J. Tysdahl in *William Godwin as novelist*. Here a picture is presented which owes something to William Empson's seventh type of ambiguity where there is 'a fundamental division in the author's mind' and something to gestalt psychology:

It is my impression that Godwin's novel has no complete thematic unity in any traditional sense. *Caleb Williams* can, in fact, be seen as either a rabbit or duck; and, as E.H. Gombrich reminds us in *Art and Illusion*, though "it is easy to discover both readings", it may be more difficult "to describe what happens when we switch from one interpretation to the other". When confronted with analagous difficulties in *Caleb Williams*, a reader should not, I think, succumb too easily to one of the critic's sweetest temptations—the wish to present an interpretation of a work of art which makes it look very complex and absolutely coherent. In this case such a generally profitable attempt may be unrewarding, for it is only when the curiously unstable relationship between different readings is kept in mind that the novel's particular liveliness can be accounted for.<sup>20</sup>

Once more, it would be impossible to do justice to Tysdahl's extensively detailed support of his case in the short space available here. But we can at least question whether his recourse to endlessly alternating perspectives in *Caleb Williams*, to a fundamental instability of viewpoint in the narrative, is the best way forward. Does it not evade the difficulty of interpretation as it appears to resolve it? What we might be looking for is an interpretation which, like Tysdahl's, admits the ambiguity of much of the text yet does not evade the possibility of encountering a 'dominant' reading. In such an interpretation other strands of signification would not be ignored but nevertheless one pattern of meaning would do most to structure the work and give it coherence.

That we should be looking for such a compellingly dominant reading of the novel depends, I believe, on an inescapable choice of prior assumptions about what sort of work it is, that is on its generic classification. And I suggest that it is by thinking of a concept such as 'the philosophical novel' that we can best release coherent meanings from *Caleb Williams*. The concept is not that of the philosophical fable, that modern form of allegory so brilliantly executed by Johnson, Voltaire, Huxley and Orwell. Nor, by contrast, is it the large, inclusive work (Dostoevsky, Proust) which embeds philosophical conflict in an infinitely complex play of psychological and social drama. It is somewhere between these poles that we can locate novels such as *Joseph Andrews*, *Caleb Williams*, *Nausea*, *The Plague* or *Under the Net*.

In such works we can sense the felt life of a rich characterization well beyond the demands of a philosophical fable while at the same time feeling that the play of signification is being tightly controlled and ordered towards the illumination of a single cluster of issues.

Inevitably, such novels will be found wanting if we employ a single criterion of fictional excellence—such as the infinite significances which appear to attend *Heart of Darkness*, *The Golden Bowl*, or *To the Lighthouse*. But to employ more pluralistic set of evaluations is to see that this form of fiction offers compensations of its own. Combining singleness of focus and relative depth of characterization it is uniquely capable of effecting a sharp reorientation of our perspectives on a particular set of important issues—ethical in *Joseph Andrews*, socio-political in *Caleb Williams*, epistemological in *Nausea*, and so on. We concentrate on a particular set of issues but the psychological complexity of the characters allows for deposits of secondary significance, important conceptual sub-plots, which heighten our interest and the complexity of our response. Thus we can additionally see *Joseph Andrews* as social commentary or *Nausea* as a critique of French intellectual life between the wars and similar extensions of significance could be found in other novels of this sort.

Returning to Caleb Williams, then, what we see is the continuous organizing presence of socio-political insights and the subsidiary, less continuous presence of religious- metaphysical insights. The expression 'continuous organizing presence', if clumsy, is at least intended precisely. In short, the 'duck' of politics is (a) more frequent in its appearance and (b) has more generative organizational power than the 'rabbit' of religion. (I must here ask the reader to ignore the unintended play of denigration in the last sentence). Let us try to substantiate these points briefly. First, continuity: we can note that those who stress the religious overtones of the story tend to concentrate on particular incidents or on narrow interpretations of broader patterns. Thus the passages on Falkland's supernatural aura are frequently quoted and when Caleb is being pursued it is his anxiety state which is the sole focus. The power of such interpretations we have acknowledged. The ontological bearings of the story do give Caleb's plight a greater resonance, solemnity and universality that goes beyond specific social critique.

But the limitation of such approaches is not merely a matter of (a) but of (b) also. For the socio-political readings are at once more continuous and more explanatory. Not only can they give their own account of

some of the religious data, as Marilyn Butler made clear, by reminding us of the political use of the supernatural but they can also account for much that has been left out of such an interpretation. The whole of the first volume, for example, with its treatment of aristocracy, honour, oppression and violence is now seen as crucial to the novel's significance. More subtly, we can see how much the interpretation of Caleb's flight and pursuit omits: there is the investigation of what it means to be excluded from any mainstream social organization, and of what it means to be part of an out-group, whether prisoners or robbers. The examination of the apparently fair but really unjust operation of the courts, the contrast of Caleb's outlook with those of Brightwel, Raymond and Gines, the differences between Forrester and Falkland, all these complexly intertwined elements of local texture are given their due significance if we read for the complex ramifications of power and hierarchy in society.

Our claim for the duck over the rabbit should not be taken as absolute or out of its context. Earlier and later in his life Godwin showed himself to be profoundly involved in religious questioning, whether through the Sandemanianism of his earlier years or through the pantheistic musings of *Fleetwood*. Some of these concerns are demonstrably present in *Caleb Williams* and it is reasonable not only to point them up but, in any overall examination of Godwin's metaphysics, to give them heightened prominence. But this is not the same as attempting to read *Caleb Williams/Things as they are* in terms of its own dominant patterns of signification. Those patterns which in 1794 pointed strongly towards an analysis of the power relationships of a particular social order still point to a cognate, if broader and less specific, questioning of all those inequalities of power and resource which, as John Rawls has more recently suggested, need at least to be asked for their specific justifications.

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1. William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, D. McCracken ed. (Oxford, 1970), 1. Hereafter, 'Caleb Williams'.
2. *Ibid.*, 1.
3. *Ibid.*, 336-337.
4. B.J. Tysdahl, *William Godwin as novelist* (London, 1981), 64-69.
5. P.N. Furbank, 'Godwin's novels', *Essays in Criticism*, V (1955), 215-216.
6. D.H. Monro, *Godwin's moral philosophy* (London, 1953), 88.
7. *Caleb Williams*, 325.

8. Footnote to the third edition (1798) of *An enquiry concerning Political Justice*, quoted in James T. Boulton, *The language of politics in the age of Wilkes and Burke* (London, 1980), 72.
9. Don Locke, *A fantasy of reason: the life and thought of William Godwin* (London, 1980), 72.
10. *British Critic*, July 1795.
11. Locke, 73-74.
12. *Caleb Williams*, 325.
13. *Ibid.*, 7.
14. *Ibid.*, 240.
15. Walter Allen, intro. to *Caleb Williams* (London, 1966), ix, xiv-xv.
16. Marilyn Butler, 'Godwin, Burke and Caleb Williams', *Essays in Criticism*, XXXII (1982), 250.
17. *Ibid.*, 255.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Mark Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* (London, 1986), 110.
20. Tysdahl, 31-32.

## MIND OVER MATTER: AN ANECDOTE CONCERNING THOMAS HOLCROFT

Warwick G. Forster

Among the 'Letters to Griffiths' in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, there is an interesting anecdote relating to Thomas Holcroft.<sup>1</sup> It is contained in a letter from Thomas Ogle,<sup>2</sup> an intimate friend of Ralph Griffiths and a medical reviewer for the *Monthly Review*. Unfortunately little is known about Ogle, but in the 'List of members of the Royal College of Surgeons in London' of 1841, p.200, he is listed as entering the College in 1786, and in the 'General list of members...', of 1816, p.16, he is listed as Surgeon Extraordinary to the Prince Regent, Rochester.<sup>3</sup>

About Holcroft we know a great deal more, including the fact that he reviewed for Griffiths.<sup>4</sup> According to the D.N.B. entry, 'Holcroft was a stern and conscientious man, with an irascible temper, great energy and marvellous industry'.<sup>5</sup> Many of Holcroft's contemporaries testified to his furious energy, and the following letter provides not only an intimate confirmation of this fact, but also a rare insight into Holcroft's state of mind.

Union Court, Decr. 26, 1792.

Dear Sir,

The parcel which accompanies this letter should have been with you sooner; indeed it was ready on Saturday: but I imagine that in these holiday times, when the press, like other labouring bodies, forgets its occupation, a delay of a few days can be of little importance.

I got safe to town on Sunday night; but whether I had overfatigued myself with walking, or whether my fellow traveller had given me too large a dose of *mind*, I know not: certain it is that I was sick all the evening afterwards, and have hardly been quite well since. Of a truth, that Mr. Holcroft is an oddity. He has indeed gone before the world, as he says; and the world, whip and spur as fast as it can, will never catch him! His conversation at Turnham Green<sup>6</sup> was sufficiently curious to make me desirous of learning a few of the arcana of his system, and he had himself furnished a clue by which I hoped to get at some of the contents of that compressed head of his, which promised to contain 'more than your philosophy ever dreamt of'. I did get at it indeed, but not without labour; for no sooner had he set his face towards London, than, with a body as stiff as a poker, but inclined towards the ground so as to form with it an angle of about 45 degrees, off he set at the rate of five and a half miles an hour. Well might he pity those who



travelled in carriages! they crept at a snail's pace—We beat everything on the road!—Were running-footmen in fashion now, then Holcroft's fortune would be made; his value, like diamonds above a certain size, would be inestimable.

Men naturally discourse on subjects interesting to them at the time—As soon as I had overtaken this *Pennipes*, this feather footed Perseus, I began to pant and observed that exercise might be carried too far; that our legs might be tired, and—: No such thing—we did not walk with our legs; it was mere prejudice to suppose so: *mind* produced walking: we were only tired, because we chose to be so: when men gave themselves up for fatigued, then they became fatigued: *mind* could do everything: if we really believed that we could walk twenty miles an hour, we should walk it: if we were convinced that we could take the monument on our back, we should infallibly hoist it up and run away with it.—But will mind ever make a lame man walk?—Certainly; lameness is the effect of error. No one can calculate the operations of *mind*, when it comes to be cultivated: *Mind* produces all the diseases of the body, and will cure them all. Physic and drugs are only covers for ignorance, or succedanea for knowledge: The sympathy between minds is wonderful, but we do not estimate it; one man laughing shall make a whole audience laugh, and the mind of one man in health shall cure a whole nation of sick.—The operations of the mind on the body, said I, are indeed surprising, and capable of producing wonderful effects where there is no violent change in the structure of the body.—Change of structure does not signify: mind will cure a cancer, or any other disorder: There is no necessity to die: it is unnatural to die: man's nature is to reproduce himself and not to decay: it is nonsense to say that we must all die; in the present erroneous system I suppose that I shall die; but why? because I am a Fool!

Hurrah said I:—but if a man chops your head off?—It will be impossible to chop your head off; chopping off heads is error, and error cannot exist.—But if a tree falls on you and crushes you?—Men will know how to avoid falling trees:—but trees will not fall: falling of trees arises from error.

We had now got opposite the new barracks in Hyde Park, when our Mercury, for he has wings at his head as well as his feet, observed what an expanse of mind had been lost about the time of Charles the First by being mixed up with fanaticism. Had it not been for religion, that most baneful of all evils, the progress of *mind* would have been unbounded: In France they were emancipating themselves from these fetters; Dupont had got up in the Convention, and said—“For my part, I am an atheist—but I am an honest man.” Some shrugged their shoulders, but they were few—the galleries applauded. Religion has been the scourge of mankind; and it has been made worse by having something of morality, that is of truth, mixed with it. Error must be got rid of: the improvement of mind is the true heaven; it is nonsense to talk about the blowing of trumpets.

At this time I found that my companion, in spite of his mind, seemed rather in pain, and I heard with concern that he had a strange swelling on the collar bone, which neither the physic of Dr. Crawford nor his own *mind* could cure. John Hunter; says he, calls it Scrofula, which is a frightful name, but I told him that I hoped it was a complaint of his own producing and of course more easily cured. It seems that in order to fit himself for living forever, he had for a considerable time stood naked morning and night for an hour or so; and one day while he was standing thus drying his hair (no great matter of labour) he found that he could scarcely move his arm, and that a swelling was there. I hope from this account that it is a rheumatic complaint that he has got, and nothing of a more serious nature.—

Well my dear Sir, are you not completely tired? I fear so, yet I could not help giving you this little sketch of the conversation of a man, whose opinions are sometimes so strange, and sometimes so good. I would have given the world, almost, that your daughter<sup>7</sup> could have heard the dialogue, of which I can give so very faint a picture.

My very best wishes to Mrs. G. and Mr. George.  
I remain with Sincere affection,  
Yours etc.,  
Tho. Ogle.

London

1. Bodleian MSS. Add. C89, C90. Ralph Griffiths (1720-1803), was the founder, editor and proprietor of the *Monthly Review* from its first edition in 1749, until his death.
2. MSS Add C.90, ff.270-272.
3. This information is contained in B.C. Nangle, *The Monthly Review: index of contributors and articles*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1934 and 1955).
4. The D.N.B. entry for Holcroft suggests that he did not write for the *Monthly Review*. This error results from what appears to be a widespread mis-naming of the reviews. It was the *Monthly Magagazine* that Holcroft denied writing for. In fact a complete list of Holcroft's review for the *Monthly Review*, including that of William Godwin's *Political Justice*, can be found in Eldrige Colby's 'Bibliography of Thomas Holcroft', in the *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* (1922).
5. D.N.B.
6. Griffiths lived at 'Linden House' Turnham Green.
7. Anne Griffiths, later Wainwright. Her obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (Oct., 1794) notes that 'she is supposed to have understood the writings of Locke as well as perhaps, any person, of either sex, now living'.

**J.C.D. Clark**, *Revolution and rebellion: state and society in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986), x + pp. 182, hdbk. £20.00, pbk. £6.95.

This book compares selected studies on Stuart England to some major works on the eighteenth century, by arranging 'important' scholars and their books and articles in four schools of thought on the basis of their age and contemporary political commitment. The matter must be put this baldly to make it clear at the outset that J.C.D. Clark is not interested in traditional historiography. Serious historiographical studies that attempt to describe the scholarship of a period must do two things: they should be reasonably complete, by including the scholarly works that contribute to both sides of a debate, and they should display a modicum of detachment. In this science one strives above all to avoid value judgements and provide a fair and balanced evaluation of the studies of those who have worked outside of one's own specialization. Clark's book aspires to neither standard since he views scholarship as politics and research as the amassing of support for a cause. Like a self-appointed leader striding over the scholarship of two centuries, he largely ignores those who have not taken a side—they are worse than pacifists—and others, who have made the slightest ideological commitment in print, are pressed into service against their will. The result is a highly selective, biased, and misleading survey of scholarship.

Clark's thesis that historians working in one field are inclined to accept the conclusions of their colleagues working in adjacent fields, only when these conclusions support their own viewpoints, is a valuable one. Clark has energetically summarized a massive amount of research in a comparative format that promised to overcome problems of specialization and periodization. But the effort is spoiled by his selectivity and polemical approach. The villains of the book, in the order of the number and severity of the blows they receive, are Christopher Hill, E.P. Thompson, Lawrence Stone, J.H. Hexter, G.M. Trevelyan, J.H. Plumb, and H.T. Dickinson (who is treated very gently). Whereas Hill is attacked directly, Plumb is belittled with a slighting reference to one of his 'pupils' who apparently tows the same ideological line, and a note to the effect that a 'modern biography' of Walpole is still awaited, to be provided, of course, by a 'revisionist' (36, 86). It is not enough for a young scholar to handle the greatest twentieth-century historians of modern Britain roughly once, as he did in *English society* (1985); Clark believes they deserve a second book of their own. His heroes are G.R. Elton, Conrad Russell, John Morrill, Peter Laslett, Ian Christie, J.G.A. Pocock, and D.C. Moore. Amazing-

ly, Clark's political programme for the study of history as propaganda is made explicit. For example, he hopes to encourage an alliance between those 'revisionists' working in the high-politics school and those in the school of provincialism in order better to quash the enemy (57-65). He not only expects to see a growing revisionist consensus, he attempts to encourage this consensus and nurse it into being (40, 43, 119, 169). He reassures us that it would 'be wrong to suggest that revisionists are all scholars with present-day conservative opinions' (100), but among the 'revisionists', no one has taken such an explicitly adversarial role on behalf of Thatcherite conservatism as Clark. He calls on the discipline of history to do service in the interest of the 'revisionist' cause, and as if this were not hard enough, he denigrates those who do not see matters his way as lazy, slow, weak, unable, quaint, naive, and dated (16, 33, 40, 43). 'Real historians', Clark avers, will understand political reality and human motivation as he does (96).

Who are the Hanoverian 'revisionists'? Clark gives different answers in different parts of the book; at one point it is anyone who significantly alters an earlier interpretation, but in the case of Jacobitism, it is those who push the argument for the influence of Jacobitism furthest (101, 125). He depicts 'revisionists' as finding a 'high degree' of continuity in society, while his opponents have celebrated discontinuity (40-41). At one point he argues that 'revisionist initiatives in the diverse realms of high politics, psephology, social structures, ideology and economic history were therefore essentially the same phenomenon: they can be best understood together.' For evidence, Clark then cites the works of, among others, John Phillips and D.C. Moore (35). To say that Phillips and Moore are both 'revisionists' is surely to empty the term of all ideological meaning. Is a revisionist, then, one who deals seriously with Anglicanism? On this basis, Norman Sykes should certainly qualify, but he does not, apparently because he belongs to the wrong generation. Are J.A.W. Gunn and Colin Bonwick in the revisionist camp? They have produced two of the best books in the field of eighteenth-century religion and politics, and yet neither they nor their works are mentioned. One begins to wonder if the best scholarship cannot be so nicely categorized, yet 'revisionists' are characterized by Clark as giving us a 'more profound rethinking of the issues involved' (126). Pocock, we are told, is 'one of the scholars who stood outside the sociological categories employed in this book' (94), and one is bound to ask, how many other important scholars 'stand outside' of Clark's categories? Yet 'revisionists' 'come to dispense with', they 'sought to test', they 'explored', they 'corroborated', and 'claimed'. Clark puts all of this forward with very scant documentation. Is it, then, an innovative



methodology that makes a revisionist, the date of the scholar's birth, or is it his contemporary political commitment? In this book, the answer is that any or all of these will do equally well, provided the scholarship supports Clark's programmatic attack on Marxist and Whig historians. Evidently, 'revisionism' is a reified category; like Clark's 'radicalism' and 'liberalism', it has no basis in reality.

Joanna Innes, in a cannonade in *Past and Present* (1987) that amply demonstrates the biases of Clark's social and economic theories in *English society*, has handled his treatment of secular matters very ably, and in an equally severe indictment, Christopher Hill has warned Clark off the seventeenth century (*Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 1987). Some further remarks, however, are required on Clark's interpretation of the issue of religion in society, and the nature of eighteenth-century radicalism. Clark is entirely correct to insist on the centrality of religious issues in Hanoverian England, but he is wrong to assert that this was discovered by the 'revisionists' in the mid-1980s and not by the scholars he calls 'Old Guard', 'Old Hat', and 'the class of '68' (15, 16, 30, 102, 108). G.M. Trevelyan is a case in point. His much maligned essay on 'The two party system in English political history' put religion front and centre, yet this fact is not once mentioned in either *English society* or *Revolution and rebellion*. Instead, Clark refers to 'the shallowness, the superficiality and glibness' of much of Trevelyan's writing (18-19, 144-145). He rightly discredits Trevelyan's 'two-party teleology', yet ignores Trevelyan's insight into the importance of the distinction between High Churchmen and Low Churchmen and Dissenters for party politics, and society—insights which arose from the great historian's extensive research on the reign of Queen Anne. We do not learn from Clark anything about J.H. Plumb's recognition of the importance of John Wesley, and while E.P. Thompson did not like either Wesley or Old Dissent, he certainly recognized the centrality of religion, even if he hated its influence. Similarly Harold Perkin gave a great deal of attention to eighteenth-century religion. If John Cannon made the important connection between reform and religion, but did not develop it (158), Trevelyan, Thompson, Perkin, Sir Herbert Butterfield, Walter Arnstein, and others have developed it at length.<sup>1</sup>

Because of Clark's desire to credit 'revisionism' with the discovery of the importance of religion for eighteenth-century studies, he denigrates the contribution of Norman Sykes—the work of that 'amiable patriarch' was a 'weak apology' (108)—and passes over a whole body of literature that predates the 1980s. Sykes pioneered a new kind of ecclesiastical history and rescued this discipline from the presuppositions of Victorian

ecclesiastical partisanship, in much the same way that Namier destroyed the Whig interpretation of political history. Sykes' books on Edmund Gibson and William Wake are far more than biographies; the late G.V. Bennett called the massive work on Wake 'the indispensable tool' for the study of the Church of England in the reigns of Anne and George I. The same breadth of treatment of society and politics is found in Bennett's own studies of White Kennet (1955) and Francis Atterbury (1975), and in his other numerous essays published in the 1970s. One finds no hint in Clark's pages of George Every's very important book on High Church Anglicans (1956), nor Douglas R. Lacey's valuable study of *Dissent and parliamentary politics, 1661-1689* (1969). Interest in the religious climate of late Stuart and early Hanoverian England therefore considerably predates the rise of 'revisionism', as is further proven by the work of Geoffrey Holmes on Sacheverell in 1973 and his *Religion and party in late Stuart England* in 1975. At a colloquium on Hanoverian politics and society in 1979, Geoffrey Holmes, H.T. Dickinson, William Speck, Frank O'Gorman, John Cannon, John Derry and Norman McCord concurred that religion was of enormous importance for understanding the period.<sup>2</sup> Holmes and O'Gorman in particular have given considerable attention to the impact of religion on party politics. But Clark confidently asserts that the nexus of religion and party even in the post 1714 period was not explored until the mid-1980s (153, 158).

In the field of eighteenth-century English literature, Donald Greene's oft-repeated insistence on the centrality of Christian theology for understanding the period is well-known. With excellent studies on religion and society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by G.F.A. Best (1964), W.R. Ward (1972), Alan Gilbert (1976), and E.R. Norman (1976), several of which specifically challenge the secularization thesis, how can Clark in good conscience insist that previous historians have 'so resolutely laboured' to secularize religion (23)? Certainly the secularization thesis was characteristic of the writings of E.P. Thompson and E.J. Hobsbawm, but to say this is to tell us nothing new. It is astonishing that Clark can refer to other scholars being 'a quarter of a century in arrears in their understanding of scholarship in adjoining periods' while he passes over dozens of important studies in his own, or asserts that the few works that were published did not get on 'the agenda' of most historians (2, 110). Of course, to mention these books would bring into serious question both the importance of the 'revisionist' school and its imagined discoveries. Thus the reader of this volume must be alert to Clark's weighting of the argument by the selection of the sources; this is characteristic not only of his treatment of religion and the social divisions of the eighteenth



century; we see the same in the handling of the putative neglect of the peerage (34), the benign influence of the law (42), the growth of the power of the executive (88-90), the Christian nature of divine right theory (104), and the lack of connection between industrialization and Nonconformity (32, 95). Clark attempts to make his own light shine the more by the thankless method of dimming that of others, or ignoring them altogether.

While Clark refers with contempt to those who have studied religion in terms of its rapid secularization, no one has advanced the idea of one important branch of Christendom with more consistency than Clark himself. His treatment of Nonconformity constricts the political potency of Dissent to its heterodox or secular trajectory. For one who has committed himself to diminishing the significance of any ideology but the dominant Anglican one, this is not surprising. But it has very important implications for the study of radicalism. Not all heterodox Dissenters were radicals (one thinks of Edward Pickard), while numerous orthodox Dissenters were (Caleb Evans, James Murray, Rees David, Samuel Palmer, Samuel Wilton, and others). The heresy-radicalism thesis framed in the way Clark casts it simply does not work: when one examines those things that orthodox and heterodox radical Dissenters had in common, it becomes clear that the Dissent-radical nexus was a nexus of legal status and polity, not liberal theology. The radicalism of some of these Calvinist Dissenters, Murray and David in particular, was even more advanced than that of the heterodox. Clark quotes Ronald Stromberg to the effect that there was no necessary connection between religious radicalism and socio-political radicalism, and then says, 'revisionists now reversed this judgement'(101). One is bound to ask, what 'revisionists'? Clark and who else? John Gascoigne and John Seed offer far more balanced and nuanced variations of the radicalism-heresy thesis than Clark.<sup>3</sup> Clark is quick to point to the small number of Dissenters, since he wishes to diminish the importance of radicalism, but he gives us no idea of why major tracts like Price's *Observations on the nature of civil liberty* were so popular, nor does he mention the fact that one quarter of the politically oriented sermons that were published during the American Revolution were preached by Dissenting ministers.<sup>4</sup> Clark has effectively reduced political radicalism to theological heterodoxy, thereby at once simplistically shrinking the complex social base of radicalism to ideology alone, and denying its economic side altogether (see *English society*, 281, 292-293, 311, 322-333, 373-374, 378, 423).

The idea of 'underground radicalism' that Clark so scathingly denounces is based in fact on such literary sources as radical newspaper

articles and pamphlets that express discontent with the government (98-99, 128).<sup>5</sup> One who denies the existence of this undergrowth of popular disaffection cannot have read the *York Courant*, the *Newcastle Courant*, the *Kentish Gazette*, *Exeter Journal*, *Norwich Gazette*, *Jopson's Coventry Mercury*, the *Cambridge Chronicle*, *Newark and Nottingham Journal*, and the *Leeds Mercury*. The editors of these provincial newspapers expressed radical ideas, if they were not radicals themselves, and it can now be said with confidence that the extent and significance of urban radicalism in the provinces in the 1770s has not yet begun to be fathomed. However, far more is at stake in this debate than radical ideology. Clark argues that quantitative studies, local studies, and studies of 'high politics' have helped render the notion of revolution untenable and that they support the idea of England as an *ancien régime* state (35, 38-39, 43-44). As in *English society*, Clark makes much of his critique of 'economic reductionism' depend on the poll book analysis of John Phillips, which registered little or no socio-economic divisions related to politics in four boroughs in the period 1761-1802 (158-161). But it has become increasingly clear that poll books are too blunt an instrument to measure social divisions. Based upon George Rudé's pioneering social analysis of those who petitioned the crown concerning the Middlesex election affair, several studies have examined the occupational status of those who petitioned the crown in opposition to government policy in the 1760s and 1770s. Thomas Knox's articles on Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Peter Marshall's study of Manchester, John Sainsbury's recent book on the London pro-Americans, and my own research on Bristol, Newcastle, Liverpool, Colchester, Coventry, Nottingham, Southampton, Great Yarmouth, and Cambridge reveal that the decisive support for the government's measures of coercion arose from the gentlemen, those in the professions, and the merchants, whereas pro-Americanism gained overwhelming support from the shopkeepers or retailers and craftsmen.<sup>6</sup> These local studies demonstrate the reality of underlying socio-economic divisions and religion as the basis for the people's political orientation, and Rudé's, Knox's and Marshall's studies were available to Clark before he wrote *Revolution and rebellion*. But these articles and books, along with the more qualitative evidence for social divisions adduced by John Brewer, John Money, and H.T. Dickinson were passed over in silence, and thus Clark has ignored recent work in both qualitative and quantitative sources to his own great hurt. Far from local studies contributing to an emerging 'revisionist' consensus, it seems likely that in the future scholars will document a growing diversity and richness on the topic of the origins of radicalism and social evolution.

Further research on the causes of political and social change will probably reveal the interdependence of ideology, religion, and economic interests, rather than the hegemony of a dominant ideology. Certainly it would be ill-advised and dangerously reductionist to focus our attention on a single methodology, like high political narrative, or a single aspect of political reality, like Anglican political theology. At the highest level of political events, Clark contends that 'Dissent, not Democracy, broke down the old order' (162). At the local level he acknowledges 'a considerable degree of popular awareness of theoretical matters', but thinks this awareness was confined to 'questions of religion', not emerging class interests grounded in economic inequalities (166). But to suppose that one may find in Hanoverian England an ideology that cannot be explained by anything else is fanciful (66). For example, the way in which socially independent anti-corporation interests melded with the religious concerns of Nonconformists in Bristol, Norwich, Nottingham, Liverpool, Coventry, Colchester, Exeter, Leicester, and Worcester suggests that we will not find ideology neatly isolated from interest. How much less would this be possible with Anglicanism and the interests of the state? Instead, students of eighteenth-century England should seek to find ways of integrating different methodologies while at the same time accepting differences of approach and results; and when methods and conclusions cannot be reconciled, we should order them in terms of their apparent truthfulness and explanatory power, rather than attempting to sweep the field clean.

Clark is perfectly happy to allow the contemporary resurgence of conservative values do service in the field of history by supplying both energy and direction for the task. Instead of attempting to transcend his own political biases, he focuses attention only on those sources that support his own views. For example, to further the cause, he has provided us with an appendix that prints Cardinal Newman's theses on liberalism, and instead of painstaking work in the unfamiliar and distasteful terrain of popular politics, Clark appeals to the opinion of François-René de Chateaubriand to help us understand the absence of social class in England (31-32). Living in the mental world of Chateaubriand and Newman, it is little wonder that Clark can doubt the reality of mass participatory democracy even today (137).

But it is also useful to observe that, indirectly, Clark's books have raised important questions concerning the history profession. The advantages and virtues of historical detachment are one of the first things we teach aspiring research students. We insist that no secondary interpretation can be properly challenged or effectively criticized apart

from detailed work in primary sources. Patient research in the sources may lead one to make some alterations in received accounts, but these changes are often matters of substantiating an existing line of argument, or making minor readjustments in a theoretical framework. But whereas most historians would resist the temptation to reinterpret an era on the basis of an exposure to even the best secondary interpretations, Clark works with little respect for accepted professional conventions. As a result, we find in *Revolution and rebellion* a striking absence of any primary research and a cavalier handling of secondary literature.

From time to time, colleagues have commented that Clark has done those of us who are involved in eighteenth-century studies a favour by stirring up controversy, stimulating interest in the field, and raising the ideological stakes of our research. I strongly disagree. Such an argument accepts Clark's premise and effectively moves one onto his ground. Interest in the field should arise from a passion for the subject matter itself, not a passion for controversy or any contemporary dogma. One is properly motivated by the desire simply to get the story straight, and not for the purpose of advancing this or that contemporary ideology. The study of history can never be entirely objective, nor should it be without implications for today, but we certainly lessen our chances of examining objectively the past and drawing valid lessons from it, if we do not attempt to suspend our biases and proclivities. If interest in the field of eighteenth-century studies is to be purchased at the price of intentionally politicizing our work, then the reputation of history as a profession will suffer accordingly; the historian who needs to be 'provoked' (ix) to consult even secondary sources should seriously consider why he is in the profession at all. But Clark has prearranged his own immunity at every point; both he and other 'revisionist' readers of this review and these concluding homiletic remarks may readily dismiss them, since Clark assures us, American historians (much like Marxists and Liberals) face 'peculiar problems' in explaining *ancien-régime* England (169).

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1. See the documentation in Walter L. Arnstein, 'The religious issue in mid-Victorian politics: a note on a neglected source', *Albion*, 6 (1974), 134-143; and James Bradley, 'Religion and reform at the polls: Nonconformity in Cambridge politics, 1774-1784', *Journal of British Studies*, 23 (1984), 55-78.
2. Published in John Cannon ed., *The Whig ascendancy: colloquies on Hanoverian England* (London, 1981).

3. John Gascoigne, 'Anglican Latitudinarianism and political radicalism in the late eighteenth century', *History*, 71 (1986), 30; John Seed, 'Gentleman Dissenters: the social and political meaning of Rational Dissent in the 1770s and 1780s', *Historical Journal*, 28 (1985), 316-317.
4. Henry P. Ippel, 'Blow the trumpet: sanctify the fast', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 44 (1980), 43-60.
5. These passages sound vaguely reminiscent of my 'Whigs and Nonconformists: "slumbering radicalism" in English politics, 1739-1789', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 9 (1975), 1-27, written as a graduate student when I was still under the influence of the writings of Sir Lewis Namier.
6. Thomas Knox, 'Popular politics and provincial radicalism: Newcastle upon Tyne, 1769-1785', *Albion*, 11 (1979), 224-241; and 'Wilkism and the Newcastle election of 1774', *Durham University Journal* 72 (1979-1980), 23-37; Peter Marshall, 'Manchester and the American Revolution', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 62 (1979), 168-186; John Sainsbury, *Disaffected patriots: London supporters of Revolutionary America, 1769-1782* (Kingston and Montreal, 1987); James E. Bradley, *Popular politics and the American revolution in England: petitions, the crown, and public opinion* (Macon, Georgia, 1986). The work on Bristol, Newcastle, Liverpool, Coventry, Colchester, and Nottingham is yet to appear in print.

**James J. Hoecker**, *Joseph Priestly (sic) and the idea of progress* (Garland publishing Inc., New York and London, 1987), 238pp.

It is a commonplace that writing history means mediating between past and present. Intellectual history in particular, which requires the historian both to understand the thinking of his predecessors and to make it intelligible to his contemporaries, involves a delicate balance between opposed demands. It is inevitable that his own contemporary outlook and preoccupations should guide his approach to the past, but if he cannot suspend them sufficiently to be receptive to the very different preoccupations of the thinkers he studies, he may succeed as a propagandist but scarcely as an historian. History has many uses, but the categorical imperative of the historian as such is the command to acknowledge the otherness of the past and to allow his subject-matter to guide his treatment of it. Nowhere is this imperative more salutary than in studying the 'enlightened', 'progressive' thinkers of the eighteenth century. Precisely because they seem to be ancestors of modernity we can assume too easily that we understand them, and fail to recognize the otherness in which they, too, are clothed.

Joseph Priestley has suffered more than most from this kind of historical foreshortening. Rationalist, scientist, materialist; progressive, liberal, radical: he seems to fit into so many familiar categories that historians have often been tempted to brush aside the aspects of his thought that do not easily fit the picture. The trouble is that those heterodox religious preoccupations that seem aberrations to impatient commentators were actually at the very heart of Priestley's outlook on life.

These reflections are provoked by James Hoecker's book, which is avowedly concerned with Priestley as a 'liberal', the kind of 'liberal', moreover, who used to feature in the demonology of the Seventies' Left: a 'bourgeois liberal', one of those who expressed 'the middle class will to power' and established the hegemonic ideology of capitalist society. 'Liberalism' in this sense has very little to do with freedom. According to Hoecker, although the likes of Priestley may appear to have been concerned for individual liberty and freedom of thought, the logic of his views actually pointed toward a conformist society, scientifically organized according to criteria of functional rationality and dominated by giant bureaucracies and corporations. If this sounds far-fetched to us, it evidently strikes the author himself, upon re-reading, as less than wholly persuasive. For although the book was published in 1987, it is actually a PhD. thesis completed in 1975 and its



most extraordinary feature is its new preface in which the author virtually concedes that his approach is fundamentally mistaken. He agrees that he treated Priestley as an exemplar of 'liberalism', understood as a single phenomenon and judged in the light of the 'paranoia about the "liberal technocorporate superstructure"' that was sweeping American campuses at the time. Nevertheless—and this is the really remarkable thing—he has not revised the thesis for publication, having meanwhile 'entered upon the practice of law'. He suggests by way of excuse that his work 'may have some historiographic value' in that it represents the characteristic outlook of intellectual historians at the time it was written. As a justification for publication, this is a bit like a middle-aged town planner pulling thirty-year-old plans for a tower block out of his drawer, and proposing to erect it now as a monument to the mistaken architectural theories of his youth.

Dr. Hoecker expresses the hope that the study of Priestley's own ideas embedded within his outdated strictures on 'liberalism' was sound, and 'was accomplished without succumbing altogether to historicism'. This hope is not entirely justified, although the main body of the thesis is much better than the highly tendentious introduction leads one to expect. While there is nothing here that is original, much in Hoecker's account of Priestley's progressive philosophy is sound. When he is wrong it is usually because in his anxiety to classify Priestley as a 'bourgeois liberal', he has failed to take seriously the absolute centrality of religion in Priestley's world-view. This insensitivity to what he on occasion refers to as 'theological trappings' misleads him again and again. Thus he dismisses as 'visceral fear of authority' Priestley's entirely justified wariness of any educational arrangements that could extend the stranglehold of the established church. Priestley's faith in Divine Providence turns into 'a historicist mentality', while his conviction that, under Providence, each man's perfection is compatible with that of all becomes a facile bourgeois assumption of a natural identity of interests in society. Since Hoecker degrades Priestley's religion itself into an 'instinct' it is perhaps not surprising that he should manage to ignore the overwhelming preponderance of religious issues within his political writings, and to claim that Priestley's approach to all the political issues of his time expressed the claims of bourgeois liberalism.

Jonathan Clark has recently argued that historiography has systematically misrepresented the period of English history between the Glorious Revolution and the Great Reform Act, by reading into it modern preoccupations, and above all by wilfully ignoring the enormous

salience for those who lived at the time of religious ideas and institutions. Those inclined to feel that Dr. Clark is guilty of exaggerating the problem might find it instructive to read this book. Except as a warning, it cannot be recommended.

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**Whitney R.D. Jones**, *David Williams: the Anvil and the Hammer* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1986), xviii + pp.266, £25.95.

Whitney Jones' book is the first full dress study to appear of David Williams' (1736-1816) life and thought. During his own lifetime the colourful Williams attracted considerable attention, much of it unwanted. The Philosopher, Priest of Nature, Abettor of Rebellion and Republicanism are some of the more notable epithets he acquired, though during the latter stages of his life he seems to have taken care not to attract notice to his person for fear that it would adversely affect the prospects of projects he was determined to have succeed, most notably his Literary Fund.

After his death Williams largely fell from public view. His publications became collectors' items for antiquarians, although he emerged sporadically as a footnote to the history of Deism, in the expression of progressive ideas of education, and as a prize competed over in the public contest between the reformers led by Charles Dickens and the conservative establishment which managed by then what had become the Royal Literary Fund who each wished to appropriate its founder as authority for their own conception of how it should proceed.

The growing contemporary interest in Williams can be traced back to the historical research done by his namesake, the late Professor David Williams of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. His plan and likewise that of the late Professor Nicholas Hans, who approached Williams from the standpoint of an historian of education, to do a booklength study of Williams was frustrated. In the meantime recognition of Williams' importance to the history of eighteenth-century radicalism has continued to grow, but a proper estimate of Williams' role in this development has been rendered difficult by the absence of the careful and sober disentangling of fact from anecdote that Whitney Jones has produced. As will be evident to those who read it, the book is a labour of love, assiduous in its search for and examination of source material.

The book's title is drawn from an anecdote related by Williams in his autobiographical apologia, *Incidents in my own life which have been thought of some importance*. Williams had met Benjamin Franklin early in 1773 and with him founded a club which Josiah Wedgwood, another member, referred to as the Wednesdays' after the day on which they generally met. The club was established as a result of the publication of Williams' *Essays on public worship* which appealed to the friends of a

philosophical liturgy designed to transcend sectarian controversy by restricting itself to principles of religion and morality which could be *known* by natural investigation. Wedgwood affectionately dubbed the project the Catholic Church. Williams represents himself as so discouraged by the response to his call that he proposed instead the founding of a literary fund to assist writers in distress. The other members and Franklin in particular, prevailed upon Williams against his better judgment to persist with the reformed liturgy which he says 'nearly effected my ruin by calumnies on my reputation and injuries to my fortune'. When Williams met privately with Franklin the following day, he says that Franklin 'perceived the state of my mind, and as I quitted the room, he pronounced these words, which have a thousand times rung in my ears: "I see you will not give up a noble idea. I do not say you will not succeed, but it must be by much anxiety and trouble, and I hope the anvil will not wear out the hammer."'

The tension between the anvil and the hammer is not only used by Jones in the context Franklin intended it, but as a general theme for judging Williams' achievement. For Williams was in many spheres a projector of noble ideas. In the religious, he founded a notorious chapel in Margaret Street with a deistic public service which is thought to be the first such in Europe. In education, he was not only a fierce if sympathetic critic of Rousseau, but an experienced teacher whose livelihood depended on his success and who established a short-lived but significant school on progressive principles in Chelsea in which Franklin is said to have taken an interest not long before he left to return to America. In politics, he was a theorist of political reform whose major achievement was the development of a distinctive conception of political liberty and his advice was sought if not always heeded by Brissot and his circle in revolutionary France. In literature, he largely devoted the last three decades of his life to the establishment of a literary fund on a sound footing, the one institutional memorial to testify to his organizational skills, though it never entirely succeeded in living up to his full expectations for it as a 'common centre of [literary] communication and action' and 'a College for Decayed and Superannuated Genius', as he put it in a letter to his patron, the Earl of Chichester.

Structurally Jones' book is an uneasy compromise between chronological/biographical and thematic/textual approaches to William's life and work. The first chapter, 'A Philosopher's Apprenticeship', whose title derives from Williams' first published book, *The philosopher in three conversations*, treats his early life as well as the first two of *The philosopher's* conversations. These last move between commentary on

the contemporary malaise of English politics and the central problem of political theory which he conceives to be that of obtaining 'the will of the people, freely and properly expressed; and their power shewn in their readiness to put it into execution' (2nd. conversation, p.23).

Chapter two, 'Orpheus, Priest of Nature', focusses on the establishment of Williams' deistic chapel in Margaret Street as well as the religious writings, which led to and coincided with its brief existence from 1776 to 1780, and their impact. Among these are the last of *The philosopher's* three conversations which advances the case for a non sectarian liturgy to serve as the vehicle for enlightened moral reconstruction. At no point, however, does Jones inquire why Williams found it proper in his first published work to make the case at once for political and liturgical reform. At the other end, the discussion of *An apology for professing the religion of nature* which, with its extraordinary theistic liturgy, did not appear until 1789 is postponed for a later chapter with a regrettable loss of focus in tracing the unfolding of his religious views. By contrast the third chapter, 'A Practicable Education', spans Williams' reformist educational writings from 1774 through 1789.

The following four chapters deal predominantly with Williams' political theory from 1776 onwards. Here Williams' views are charted in relation to the growth of political radicalism in Britain, his influence upon the Brissotin circle in the early years of the French Revolution and his own deepening disillusion with the development of the Revolution. On a theoretical plane Jones' account might have done more to set Williams' thought in the context of late eighteenth-century debate on the nature and relative value of political liberty against civil liberty. Notwithstanding, these chapters are, to my mind, the most compelling of the book. Particularly praiseworthy is the commentary on the way Williams' later observations on the French Revolution, in combination with his acceptance of Malthusian economic theory, illustrates the weakening of his earlier confidence that he had indeed discovered the fundamental principles of political science. His earlier savaging of the English constitution for its failure to embody political liberty in its organizational structure was replaced by a cautious regard for its virtues. As Williams remarked in 1796, 'in the absence of a reliable political compass, it is safer to follow Montesquieu along the shore...than to follow Plato and Rousseau and perish in the ocean'.

The book concludes with analyses of Williams' Welsh writings and connections, his sustained effort to establish the Literary Fund on a sound and permanent footing and a general assessment of his standing.

Unfortunately the account of Williams' efforts to establish the Literary Fund is unfocussed, fragmentary and disappointing. The archives of the Royal Literary Fund and a wealth of printed material from the period afford an unusually well documented opportunity to show how successful Williams was in building and holding together a society where the potential for conflict between political reformers and conservatives was considerable and the temptation to permit one's political and religious prepossessions to guide one's charitable responses was ever present. Differences which had torn apart his chapel at Margaret Street and disappointed his political aspirations were here at least successfully managed.

The structure of Jones' book reflects his assessment of Williams as a thinker. He fails to find in him any overarching and coherent philosophy, though Williams, ironically in Jones' estimation, identified with the role of The Philosopher. The irony for Jones arises from the philosopher's professed disavowal of metaphysics, but readers of Hume, whom Williams admired, will find no irony. Instead of the mind of a philosopher, Jones finds the mind of a pamphleteer. Indeed, Jones lavishes more time and attention to Williams' satirical pamphlet *Royal recollections of a tour to Cheltenham*, where the first-person mock diary of George III is used as the vehicle for an acidic account of contemporary politics, than he does to the two volumes of the *Lectures on the universal principles and duties of religion and morality*. These were the lectures Williams delivered at Margaret Street over the first two years of its existence.

This approach to Williams' thought is the most significant shortcoming of Jones' book. At times Williams certainly wrote as a pamphleteer, but in works such as the *Lectures on the universal principles and duties of religion and morality* he set out to articulate deeper systematic principles. They range not only over religion and morality, but draw out implications for education and politics as well. Indeed, this wide ranging interweaving of themes is not a unique characteristic of the *Lectures*, but a constant in his thought. Regrettably one derives little of this sense of connectedness from Jones' book.

In morals, as in religion, education and politics, Williams reveals himself as a thoroughgoing naturalist committed to an unbounded intellectual liberty as an indispensable condition for the discovery of philosophical knowledge. Natural religion was in his view a sparse science. The failure of religionists to acknowledge the severe limits of what was known or knowable concerning God and His nature had



served as one of the great sources of human misery. Natural morality, by contrast, was a rich science, but a science which, whatever might be true of other sciences, each individual had to discover for him or herself. Because this discovery was the foundation for human happiness or well-being, it was the prime object of education and the foundation of political life. On morals and in education, Williams found the surest models among the Greek philosophers and in morals, at least, Socrates was his particular hero, just as the later Plato in the *Republic* inspired Williams in the project of tying together education with politics. Like the Greeks Williams defended a virtue-based moral theory. Unfortunately Jones fails to take its measure. Indeed, when he directly comments on Williams' moral outlook, he is inclined to see it as a confused mixture of Benthamite utilitarianism and moral intuitionism. In truth it was neither. This failure to take the measure of Williams as a moralist and moral epistemologist is crucial. For while his moral outlook by itself may not have been unusual, the implications he drew from it for the theory of education and politics certainly helped to set him apart. He remarked of moral philosophy in his *Lectures on education* that his highest ambition was 'to afford some assistance, in producing a condition of society, when it may be unembarrassed by authority, and taught in the manner of algebra or geometry' (III, 50). This is not to say that Williams' thought did not alter in response to circumstances or his own changing preoccupations and doubts, but these changes cannot be fully appreciated without reference to this moral core.

A second weakness of Jones' book must be seen against the background of the fragmentary state of research on Williams's life and work. Jones has gone some distance towards pulling these fragmentary threads together. He considers the reviews of Williams' published writings (though the claim that Williams' *Egeria* was not reviewed is a lapse, since a two-part review appeared in the *Critical Review* in 1805 and an earlier review in the *Annual Review* for 1804 had successfully identified Williams as the anonymous work's author) and he traces comment on Williams' ideas and activities in a wide range of eighteenth century books and pamphlets. He also exploits well-known manuscript holdings (including collections at the National Library of Wales, Cardiff Public Library, the Library of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Archives of the Royal Literary Fund) and makes good use of other sources as well (the Wedgwood Papers at Keele and the Pelham Papers in the British Library, for example, though these last appear to have been only partially examined for Williams material). Inevitably, however, there are notable gaps.

Let me start with manuscript sources. David Williams' friendship with Brissot began around 1783. Brissot spoke of him with respect in his *Memoires*; he made his person and ideas known to his political circle; he appealed to him to come to Paris late in 1792 as a constitutional consultant; and early in 1793 he and those close to him used him as a go-between in the confused last gasp behind the scenes attempts of the governing Girondins to seek the assistance of Britain as a means of asserting political supremacy over the Mountain. The relationship is evidently a key one for understanding Williams' life and influence. Unfortunately Jones did not have access to the cache of letters from Williams to Brissot which span the period of their friendship and which survive in the collection of Brissot's papers acquired a few year's ago by the *Archives Nationales*. These letters permit a detailed tracking of the relationship and serve as a useful check against Williams' own retrospective account in his *Incidents of my own life*.

Another significant manuscript source apparently not known to Jones is the Bland Burges Deposit at the Bodleian Library. Sir James Bland Burges, who had been made vice-president of the Literary Fund with the assistance of his conservative friend William Boscawen, attacked Williams at a meeting of fund subscribers in February 1802 on the publication of the *Claims of literature* to which Williams was the principal contributor. Williams was evidently disturbed by the incident in which his contribution was singled out as immoral and treasonable, to judge from the warmth of his own characterization of it in *Incidents in my own life*. The subscribers rallied around Williams and Sir James resigned. The letters in the Bland Burges deposit throw considerable light on the nature and background of the incident and the breach in the Literary Fund that it threatened. They also show that an unsuccessful attempt was made through Williams' close friend Lord Valentia a few years later to draw Sir James back into the Literary Fund. This was characteristic. For not long after Robert Southey launched an attack on the Literary Fund, he was approached by George Dyer with Williams' blessing to see whether he might not consider joining the fund's committee, an offer Southey had no difficulty rejecting.

Another rich source of information and comment on Williams is newspaper correspondence. Especially while Williams was engaged in his deistic experiment on Margaret Street, he gained a notoriety in part through the newspapers that he was not entirely successful in shaking off in later life. Jones has taken some initial steps in tracking down this correspondence, but it is barely a start. (A correspondence he knows only through some unidentified cuttings from an especially artful

correspondent who called herself Sappho in fact appeared in 1777 in the correspondence columns of the *St. James's Chronicle*.) There was, to begin with, an extensive planted correspondence in the *Morning Chronicle* not long after the Margaret Street Chapel opened which was intended to raise interest and attendance to which the eccentric Rousseauian Thomas Day is known to have contributed. Wedgwood in one of his letters to his London business partner, Bentley, reported on Erasmus Darwin's suggestion that the projected correspondence might benefit from an outrageous attack from a contrived bilious cleric whose role he volunteered to assume and indeed just such a character launches the exchange of letters printed by the *Morning Chronicle*. Afterwards, the intervals were not extensive when some curious attender at Margaret Street would comment in the papers on what Williams had said, for example, on the occasion of Voltaire's death, or failed to say on the occasion of Rousseau's. Similarly the publication of Williams' own works or pamphlets replying to them frequently provoked newspaper exchanges. So extensive was the notoriety that some like the poet George Crabbe confused it with popularity and influence. He commented in his journal for 21 May 1779: 'What, I wonder, can Mr. Williams, as a free-thinker, ... find so entertaining to produce, that [his] congregations so far exceed those which grace, and yet disgrace our churches.' Had he known that Williams' congregations generally numbered considerably less than a hundred he would have made his point differently.

Finally, Jones writes at a disadvantage because Williams' bibliography is still unsettled. Jones produces at least one plausible suggestion in identifying Williams as the likely author of a biographical sketch of Brissot which appeared in *Biographical anecdotes of the founders of the French Republic*, though, if he produced this sketch, he is equally liable to have penned the sketch of Brissot's eccentric young vegetarian friend, the Marquis de Valady, given that it contains information to which Williams would have had privileged access. Since the publication of Jones' book, however, a number of hitherto unidentified publications have been traced to Williams' authorship. Particularly noteworthy is a group dealing with education which fill in the gaps between his *Treatise on education* which appeared in 1774 (itself the topic of interesting comment in the *Morning Chronicle* for 24 July 1774 where it is suggested that a venture undertaken by William Kenrick in establishing a Literary Academy called the School of Shakespeare was an unacknowledged borrowing from Williams) and his *Lectures on education* which appeared in print in 1789. Among these is a prospectus of his own educational services dating from the 1780s and an attack on the efforts

of the Dissenters in establishing Hackney Academy which appeared in 1787 under the title *Salutary admonitions to the Dissenters in a letter to Thomas Rogers, Esq., chairman of the committee for the establishment of a new academical institution*. He sees the proposed institution, far from removing the causes of disunion among the Dissenters, as adding to them. He offers this challenge: 'If in the education of other youths, you have any peculiar advantages, why not state them? If the tutors of the Institution have any eminent talents or address; and have made important discoveries in the art of education; why conceal them?—If not; why is it to be supposed the dissenting college; with hardly any apparatus; and with a miserable library; will be preferred to the English, Scottish, or German Universities?—'.

In sum, notwithstanding some shortcomings, Jones' book is highly welcome. It provides a good point of reference for the proper appreciation of the historical role and significance of a rather remarkable and unjustly neglected Welshman.

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**Gordon E. Michalson Jr.**, *Lessing's 'Ugly Ditch': a study of theology and history* (Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park and London, 1985), x + 158pp., £19.15.

Gordon Michalson has written about the role of history in Kant's religious thought, and his present work not surprisingly is informed by his insights from that earlier study. The preface to this book, which looks at first sight as if it is about the eighteenth-century world of thought, indicates that it is in fact to be a piece of polemic on behalf of 'historical revelation' as that which 'animates and sustains the worshipping community'. We need, he suggests, 'an emerging sense of ironic detachment towards the way in which we have conceptualized the problem posed in Lessing's image of the "ugly ditch"', between historical truth and religious truth in Protestantism. This very image of Lessing's, Michalson claims, is itself a symptom of the 'academicizing' of Protestant theology, with Schleiermacher marking the point at which the cultured despisers themselves turn into the theologians, the experts in historical criticism.

Lessing himself seems to have discussed not one ditch but three, and 'not only do we invoke the image of Lessing's ditch in careless and confusing ways,...we give historical and epistemological issues an unwarranted degree of importance in discussions of theology and history'—a profoundly contentious claim, I would have thought, given, let us say, attention to David Hume's view of the association of theology with irrationality, bigotry and cruelty. Michalson makes the point that 'history' itself may refer to a type of *event* or a type of *knowledge*, with this latter especially assessed as suspect. Yet according to Michalson, the impasse for Lessing and Kierkegaard at least has nothing to do with the character of historical *knowledge*, but with the category of historical *revelation*. Lessing's three ditches are temporal, metaphysical and existential, and two chapters sorting out Lessing's discussion lead us to two on Kierkegaard's, which one would hardly expect from the book's title, any more than one would expect the two last chapters on twentieth-century Protestant thought. But the schema is a useful one—it avoids leaving us with the 'so what?' response to critical exegesis and review of 'Enlightenment' documents. For all those he discusses, Michalson's *caveat* is that 'by the time they get around to characterizing historical knowledge, all the important things have already been decided'.

The temporal divide separates us from 'the religiously momentous past' (a basically factual problem). The metaphysical divide has two

models—one dictated by the philosophical criterion of necessity, the other by dogmatic Christological formulas. Neither of these is resolved through historical enquiry. Lessing in any case rejects the notion of 'divine intrusion' required for religious truth and human salvation whilst remaining interested in the category of revelation. So faith indeed *repels* theoretical inquiry and efforts to reformulate it in cognitive terms, with the result that the Cartesian tradition thrives, since what is truly primary for Lessing is 'a principle of authenticity in religious matters that has personal immediacy—one might even say, relevance—as its chief criterion.'

Anyone working after the positivist/falsification debate associated with the names of Ayer and Flew will know that the next question is whether the kind of theology which springs from this position actually *asserts* anything, or at any rate, anything that could not be said more simply, and just as adequately by other cultural means. We are on the high road, it seems from cognitive claims to reductionism. For Kierkegaard insists that historical knowledge is beside the point, because the object of faith is not a possible object of *any* sort of knowledge. What Lessing and Kierkegaard seem to have in common then, is that the *corrigible* character of historical knowledge is in *neither* of their cases the true source of the impasse between religious faith and historical enquiry.

Protestantism between 1920-1960 'proceeded on the basis of a kind of double entry book-keeping, one column for faith and one column for historiography'. All major theologians, however, have remained focused on *factual* difficulties, but meantime, there has been a major philosophical shift taking place, which encourages us to ditch the ditch, as it were, and think conceptually of a *plain*, without dualisms, thus eliminating the contingency-necessity distinction as it had been understood. So argument which relies on a mistaken understanding of the distinction will be open to question. And the move from event to 'soteriologically decisive truth claim'—Christology, the bane of discussion of 'other' religions—leads to Schubert Ogden's recapitulation, in effect, of Lessing's position, that is, to a connection between 'general revelation and human nature'. This connection (presumably given some agreement about 'human nature') is meant to eliminate 'the theological need for any particular event in history', and neatly transforms Christology into something understood as 'the specific articulation of something knowable at all times and in all places'. Unless Christianity simply is what its adherents say it is at any one period of time, even a moment's thought will perceive the difference between this position and what Christology may otherwise be supposed to be about. Amongst the



modern Protestant theologians Michalson discusses, it is Wolfhart Pannenberg who digs his heels in *against* the 'Cartesian' option and appeals to outer or public historical events and knowledge about them. But Pannenberg too is operating within the same conceptual framework as Lessing and his successors. We need to perceive why it is they all saw the problem in this particular way, and how we might see it differently.

Thus far Michalson's book is illuminating and provocative, but then precipitates exasperation, for after his historical and indeed philosophical exegesis, his concluding remarks are as brief as they are probably inevitable. One cannot expect such an exegete to offer us a new systematic theology, but he just might point us in directions possibly more constructive than what he has to offer. What he hopes to have shown us is why we should dismantle 'the conceptual framework that keeps the proper questions about history and revelation from ever coming into view' but without of course being able to tell us what these proper questions might look like, assuming that there *are* questions to which an intelligible answer or answers might in principle be given. We are likely to keep hopping from one side of the conceptual ditch to the other unless and until we assimilate the philosophical shift he wants us to make, but it is by no means clear that anything recognizably 'Christian' in the sense of cognitive truth-claims would emerge. It may simply be the case that the discussion is yet one more symptom of the 'terminal' state in which Christianity finds itself that he himself recommends the 'worshipping community' as the locus for 'historical revelation'. The uses of Wittgenstein for the demolition of Cartesianism should not lead us to ignore Pannenberg's emphasis on the 'what' of Christianity, though Michalson seems to recommend 'something more like irony' as his preferred means of demolition, which sounds like Socrates and Kierkegaard. He is also somewhat optimistic if he thinks that the 'worshipping community' is the likely source of the energy for this radical task, rather than what he calls the Academy. Protestant academic theology may have run itself into the sand, but there are other academies, and springs of living water to be found perhaps as theology actually engages with the major questions about life and death characteristic of our time, of a form of which Lessing and his successors could not know. Michalson's book is a very useful one, but one of its most important uses is to provoke its readers into looking beyond it for their resources, even if at the end of the day, they come to the conclusion that the western Protestant tradition has really remarkably little to offer them.

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**Alan Charles Kors and Paul J. Korshin editors**, *Anticipations of the Enlightenment in England, France, and Germany* (University of Philadelphia Press, Philadelphia, 1987), viii + 290pp., £28.45.

In early eighteenth-century England—one of the three countries focussed on in this collection of eleven essays by well-known scholars—the gap between the context in which a text was read and interpreted, and the context from which the writing derived its meaning could be considerable, sometimes unbridgeable. This could even be the case with a simple utterance like a piece of news. Thus, on the one hand the Catholic Church figured largely in the news translated from continental sources which were using the self-descriptive language of the Catholic Church—such as the French-language papers in the Netherlands, one of the most important sources for English news. There, for instance, and therefore in the English press, the Pope was referred to as 'his Holiness' or 'the holy Father'. On the other hand, essays in the newspapers showed the attitude to Catholicism one would expect. The discursive writings in these papers differed completely from their own news: their conceptualization of the Catholic Church is well exemplified by a quote from a Londoner given in an essay in *Applebee's Original Weekly Journal* in 1724 who called the Pope 'the Whore of Babylon'. In this juxtaposition, the use of the authentic worded news, then, was one continuous reinforcement of the given contextual meaning. This posed as an application of the authentic information that was coming in.

In a similar vein, the interplay between the context in which a meaning is given to a text on the one hand and the recoverable intentions of its authors on the other lies at the heart of several essays in this collection. Moreover, they emphasize the distinct possibility of a gap between intentions and effect, and demonstrate how authorial intentions can be subverted by context. Thus, Elisabeth Labrousse shows that lack of information about the Huguenot 'Refuge' in the Low Countries and the Calvinistic setting there led the polite readers in the salons of Paris in the 1720s to misunderstand the works of Pierre Bayle more or less completely, especially the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*. The anti-Catholic polemic of Bayle and his criticism of the religious intolerance of the Catholic Church were read in Regency Paris as anti-Christian writings, because unfamiliarity with Protestantism made Frenchmen identify Catholicism with Christianity. The intellectual separateness of early eighteenth-century Europe may perhaps have played a larger role in this distortion than the narrower contextual setting. In other aspects of the interpretation of Bayle a comparison between the intended meaning—Labrousse stresses here Bayle's biogra-

phy and the vigorous statement of Calvinistic doctrine in his work—and the actual meaning imparted by those Parisians who read him show how that was shaped by their own preconceptions. Even his attack on rationalist theology which made reliance upon blind faith a necessity was construed in the Paris of the 1720s to be a skilful way of making Christianity look ridiculous. To those readers, there was no interpretative difficulty in reading Bayle. Within their frame of reference, it was not only unnecessary, but also impossible to appreciate the problem of deciding whether Bayle's writings were the utterances of a free thinker clothed in socially acceptable terms or the work of someone who had become a sceptic because reasoning led him from true belief to questioning man's ability to discern the truth.

Three other essays raise the question of unintended effect, in each case the consequence of following a line of argumentation to its logical conclusion within a particular framework. Dale Van Kley discusses Pierre Nicole's concept of self-love within the general context of Jansenism. This world with its existing orderliness and civility presented a problem to an uncompromising doctrine of predestination which denied free will. Sharing the Augustinian view of the depravity of man, Jansenism could neither resolve this apparent contradiction by recourse to the idea of a residual goodness in man, nor combine it with the Calvinist doctrine of divine election which for Jansenists would be a presumptuous divination of God's will. According to Van Kley, Pierre Nicole uses the concept of 'enlightened self-interest' to disentangle himself and Jansenism from this difficulty. Human behaviour after Adam's fall no longer has the help of divine grace. The only motivational force left is self-love knowing no other intentions than its own fulfilment. Following the inner logic of self-interest as the only motive for human behaviour, Nicole is led to conceptualize a society which could be corrupt inwardly and in the eyes of God, but which could function on rational principles. However, as Van Kley demonstrates, this potential rational society is a theoretical construct designed to show the necessity of 'the Jansenist ethic of "humility and fear"' (p.78): actions chosen out of a spirit of 'charity' or the love of God which are the means of obtaining salvation cannot be differentiated from those chosen out of self-love. As they can always be both self-centred and—as 'charity'—orientated towards God, salvation or condemnation will always remain uncertain. A conceptualization of a rationally functioning society which agrees with a view of the total depravity of man after Adam's fall thus becomes possible. This combination is blended together through God's providential design which allows the just to prove the justness of their salvation. Obviously, taken out of the context

of Jansenism, Nicole's construct could serve as the foundation of a secular ethic based on 'enlightened self-interest'.

The question of unintended effect also comes up in connection with the contribution by Alan Charles Kors. He cites the example of an obscure French country priest, Jean Meslier, who left an atheistic testament in 1729, though there is no evidence that he had ever had access to the writings of the *libertins*. Obviously Meslier had other sources. Kors examines those theological writings which Meslier might have known and which consider the possibility of proving the existence of God. In a widely cast net, he draws together the refutations of particular proofs of God's existence used by the Aristotelian scholastics of the late seventeenth-century in their attacks upon the Cartesians. None of their arguments were by any means supposed to provide legitimation for an atheistical stance. But since they deliberately eschewed the concept of the natural demonstrability of God, which was, after all, a prescribed article of belief in French Catholicism, their disputations more or less undermined the confidence that such a demonstration was at all possible—with the unintended effect that the first speculative atheists in the eighteenth century could follow the Christian apologetic disputations to their logical conclusion.

A similar point emerges from Thomas P. Saine's discussion of the German philosopher Christian Wolff and his system, especially its implications for theologians. By separating philosophy from theology and making it a discipline relating to knowledge of this world, Wolff questioned the role and authority of theology as the intellectual decision maker. Such a programme necessarily led to controversy. Wolff was aware that he was inviting fierce opposition. Part of his discursive strategy was to post not only an advance vindication of his own arguments, but also some refutations of the foreseeable theological animadversions to his programme. Saine aptly demonstrates that while staying within Christian boundaries these arguments stretched them to the limit. He shows how Wolff moved away from founding morality in belief in God. By making morality the effect of understanding the good or evil consequences following from a possible action, Wolff could stress the universality of morality. Moral systems could include atheism and what he called the Chinese system, both of which from a traditional Christian position could only be identified with immorality. In grounding moral behaviour in rationality, Wolff saw himself as helping man to become more perfect, a process, which according to his system, began in this world. As Saine points out, this 'detached social ethic and morality from the traditional context' (p.118).



Several essays consider aspects of English cultural history and have rather different implications. The contribution of Jocelyn Harris, who studies how women writers interpreted the difficulty of female authorship, is the most original. Harris shows how the fact of doing something which was not customary led to the argument that mere custom is tyranny. If the argument remained bounded by the world of letters, at least there women writers could question the function of custom in shaping the social roles of men and women. Here then is a case where given meanings were questioned from a new context.

Margaret C. Jacob presents a deftly drawn picture of the growing dissemination of scientific knowledge in eighteenth-century England through the scientific lecture and the 'scientific culture of the philosophical societies' (p.154). Whether these small societies created a scientific culture of enlightened men and eased technological innovations, as Jacob sees it, remains an open question, as does the supposed connection with social and political stability (p.135). In the context of late eighteenth-century England some members of these societies measured social reality against the egalitarian style of such organizational forms and, disillusioned, turned to radicalism.

The third contribution that deals with English cultural history is J. Paul Hunter's explorative essay on readers and the early novel. This essay raises some difficulties. Hunter tries to trace the readership of the early novels from their topics. He sees them dealing with primarily two decisive situations in life, choice of marriage partner and choice of profession. This interpretation is combined with the early warnings against novel reading, drawn mostly from the books of conduct for young gentlemen, to show that early novel readers were mostly young men and women. In order to elucidate the needs which were answered by reading novels, Hunter uses questionable assumptions about London life in the early eighteenth-century: readers were young people who had migrated to London, who were cut loose from family ties and help, who were placed outside of the traditional sets of conduct regulations, who did not know the ways of the world, who were isolated and lonely. This model, setting traditional community against urban isolation, is not appropriate to London at this time. People there were involved in several small communities, in a parish, in the neighbourhood of particular streets (in fact, Moll Flanders is continuously moving about in London in order not to be known), in tavern or coffee-house clubs, or in the informal organization of the apprentices or journeymen of one's trade. Often, the status of a young Londoner, whether migrant or native, was narrowly prescribed. The obvious example is that of the

apprentice (especially named as 'readers') as the rulings of company courts amply demonstrate.

Hunter mentions the solitude and isolation as evidenced from letters and diaries, but in the text and in the footnotes refers only to Pope, who as a Roman Catholic and with his naked ambition is a rather bad example to prove his case. In fact, the evidence of diaries would suggest different conclusions. Similarly tendentious is Hunter's use of the example of Samuel Richardson and the way *Pamela* developed out of a book of model letters. It was more than symbolic that he watched his workmen and apprentices through a pane of glass, the window between his office and the printing-house. Furthermore, the 'young apprentice, choosing the solitude of his room to read a novel' as a response to his isolation in an urban (anonymous?) setting, is pure fantasy (p.273), as any probate record giving the contents of a master tradesman's house, or, indeed, any contemporary description, would show.

Of course, there were people in London feeling isolated and wishing to be entertained (the fourth need fulfilled according to Hunter by the early novel). But these groups were more often than not aspirants to higher status, like the 'hungry scots' or the poor gentlemen from the universities. As a result of their poverty and their gentlemanly pretensions they were often marginal figures in London life. From them came some of the writers and translators of novels, and many of the so-called hack writers who explained the rules of conduct and the choices the world offered and advised on the management of the pressures of the times. These appeared in novels and in the newspapers; there, in the essays and in the 'life studies' presented by the London news, town life was reported and commented on, explained and criticized. Thus, Hunter's reading of the early novel relies on a fictitious context and shows him to be unaware of its true setting.

There is less common ground, as one of the editors, Kors, himself hints in the introduction, between the rest of the contributions which informative as they are in themselves will only be briefly mentioned. There are two synthetic pieces, one by P. Mitchell on the enlightenment and the modern world, and one by John Andrew Bernstein on Shaftesbury's optimism and the extent to which it could be moulded into a progressive programme. Uwe-K. Ketelsen studies the dissemination of scientific knowledge in Germany by the means of literature, especially the didactic and descriptive poem. John A. McCarthy discussed the different roles which the gallant novel and the moral weekly played in the German novel after the mid-century.



Consisting mostly of stimulating and sometimes brilliant essays, it is the collection as a whole which leaves one unsatisfied. In some ways, it is like a scholarly coffee-table book, but it wants to be more as the title demonstrates. It is not clear, however, what is really being anticipated. Take the example of Pierre Nicole. In no sense could it be said that he anticipated later readings of his texts. These arose from readers choosing to interpret the text in ways which fitted into their own patterns of thought. Besides this, there is another 'problem'. Is 'enlightenment', as used in the title and consistently throughout the book, denoting a mode of being, one of criticizing the ties of tradition and preconceived ideas, and of thinking the unthinkable, or is it meant in a chronological sense? Anticipation could be read as relating to something being realized in an earlier stage of a given chronology (of what?). Used in this sense, 'anticipation' would imply that there was a homogeneous epoch, a 'siècle des Lumières' or 'siècle philosophique'. However, 'enlightenment' as a mode of being is a much more complex and diverse phenomenon which connects the late seventeenth with the early nineteenth century, so that even in the chronological sense the term enlightenment has to be put in the plural to reflect these multiplicities. Perhaps this collection of essays of a generally high standard of scholarship would have been better served by a less loaded title.

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### Communication from Chester Chapin

Sirs,

In the last issue of *Enlightenment and Dissent* (no. 6, 1987), G.A. Cole remarks (p.28) that he has yet to find a review of D.L. LeMahieu's *The mind of William Paley: a philosopher and his age* (Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press, 1976). There have been at least two reviews of LeMahieu's book: by Christopher Clausen in *T.L.S.* (8 Oct. 1976, p.1284), and by Ernest Campbell Mossner in *Studies in Burke and His Time* 19 (Spring 1978), 172-174. Clausen calls LeMahieu's book an 'excellent study'. Mossner's review is much less favorable, but LeMahieu's book, in my opinion, has the considerable merit of giving plausible reasons why Hume's destructive criticism failed to demolish the venerable 'argument from design'.

Sincerely,

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